



EDITED BY
Pilar Diarte-Blasco and Neil Christie



INTERPRETING TRANSFORMATIONS

*of People and Landscapes in Late Antiquity
and the Early Middle Ages*

Archaeological Approaches and Issues

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PEOPLE AND LANDSCAPES IN LATE ANTIQUITY
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PILAR DIARTE-BLASCO AND NEIL CHRISTIE

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Front cover, from left to right: AP of Din Lligwy enclosure (Anglesey) with a combination round and rectangular stone buildings of Romano-British date (© Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. © Hawlfraint y Goron: Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru)/Mosaic from the villa at Estada, Huesca (photo: J. Garrido. Courtesy of Museo de Zaragoza)/A Simancas-type knife and belt buckle, deposited next to the body in a grave from the fortified site of Dehesa de la Oliva, Madrid (photo: A. Vigil-Escalera)/Aerial view of Recopolis (source: cnig.es – Centro Nacional de Información Geográfica, PNOA 2010, Spain).

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This volume is the fruit of two valuable conferences-cum-workshops held in 2016 which had as their core theme current debates in interpreting changes in landscapes, towns and societies in the period of Late Antiquity. While we set a working timeframe of c. AD 350–600, it was recognised that issues in interpretation and in the evidence base could, in various territories, be extended back into the 3rd century; likewise, a proper understanding of the changes wrought often required consideration of archaeological sequences extending into the Early Middle Ages, to c. AD 700. Our geographical focus was on the western half of the old Roman world, where, as is well known, the historical record of Roman decay and late to post-Roman transition to new rulers is broadly but patchily drawn, while the related archaeologies are both complex and fragmentary and, of course, still being sought out and questioned. This volume is very much focussed on the archaeologies – urban, rural, material, social – of Late Antiquity but necessarily connects to the historical framework of new powers, conflicts and upheavals (natural as well as human).

We were honoured to have an array of leading scholars come to present and debate at our conferences, and to include a number of emerging researchers who benefitted much from the events. The first conference on *Interpreting Transformations of Landscapes and People in Late Antiquity* took place in Rome on 10–11 October 2016 and focussed on landscape/settlement and social change in the western and central Mediterranean regions. The aim here was to observe or question how far changes in what were the more developed Roman provinces (in terms of economics, rural outputs and urbanism) were comparable: did towns endure longer even if their classical forms changed? How soon did the villa landscapes decay and fail? Did ‘international’ trade and trans-Mediterranean connections persist after ‘barbarian’ takeover? Do new settlement and economic forms emerge and if so, how rapidly and how widespread? Did a ‘central’ control endure?

The second conference was held in Leicester (UK) on 5 November 2016 and was focussed on changes and trends within (far) western and north-west European territories: are the archaeologies here quite different? Are the questions here, the modes of study and the archaeological approaches comparable to Mediterranean scholarship?

The seventeen papers presented here enable readers to learn of ‘states of play’ and of the types of issues being explored. It is rare often to look outside of the Mediterranean orbit for Late Antiquity; we hope this volume provides a more shared dialogue.

We must thank various bodies for their support. Most importantly, these conferences were held within, and part-funded by, a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions/Research Fellowship (No. 658045) held by Dr Pilar Diarte-Blasco. Her project, hosted by the School of Archaeology & Ancient History at the University of Leicester, was entitled MED-FARWEST – *Urban Centres and Landscapes in Transition. The Mediterranean FarWest in Late Antiquity*, which examined transitions in western Hispania in particular, but contextualised within wider research on Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. The task of contextualisation was hugely facilitated by the organising of these two conferences. The Rome event was hosted by The British School at Rome and the Escuela Española de Historia y Arqueología en Roma (EEHAR-CSIC) and we thank both institutions for their lecture space, their receptions and their efficiency and help in supporting the conference (including accommodating various of the visiting speakers); at Leicester, thanks go to the University’s Conference Services team at College Court. And, besides the many excellent speakers, we would like to acknowledge the different audiences at the two conferences whose questions did much to stimulate debate and discussion, and, we hope, future collaborations and dialogues.

In terms of this publication, the editors are very grateful indeed to the set of five anonymous (or at least anonymous

to the contributors!) peer reviewers whose comments and advice were very much appreciated by editors and authors alike and which helped to strengthen diverse papers. And all the contributors were very patient with the editors' (especially Neil's!) edits and tinkering and with delays in the process.

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Dr Pilar Diarte-Blasco & Prof Neil Christie

February 2018

Introduction

Changing Data and Changing Interpretations in the Study of Transformations of Late Antique Space and Society

Neil Christie

Transformations and Impacts

Transformations and change are nearly always happening in society. They might be viewed by some people as positive, forward-looking, beneficial as well as necessary actions, although not always tangible and immediate. Those people might not always be the elite and the shakers and movers in a society, although it is usually these who seek to gain benefit most from change. Key in this context is to persuade the rest of a society of the wider positives of change and transformation: 'In the long run we will all be better off ...'; 'Brexit will open new doors and new opportunities ...'; 'The transition will not be painful ...'; 'Closing our borders will ensure a safer future for us all ...'; 'By imposing these new economic sanctions, our own economy will improve ...'; or 'Appointing this manager will help the team turn the corner and bring success back to the club'. But sometimes the changes are not for or led by the elite: they can be the result of wider social or religious pressure, prompted by economic struggle – the ground-swell of frustration from supporters of a football/rugby/baseball club leading to managers or directors being sacked; shoppers failing to shop and buy from certain stores, leading to shop closures; pubs closing because of rising beer prices and cheaper booze available at supermarkets. Even in those cases, there is no extra power that comes to and remains in the hands of these 'ordinary people', even if they feel empowered at the time, since elites tend to come back to lead and regain control.

All such 'positive' changes can impact on and transform a space, such as a modern town or city: new out-of-town shopping centres are set up; new stadia are built for big sports teams looking to bright futures; councils can invest in property and specific infrastructures to flag the new opportunities promised; etc. Yet alongside these we sometimes fail to spot the *negative* reactions and impacts:

in many modern cities, old central venues are neglected or bypassed for new and redirected commerce; closed premises can remain long redundant and impact adversely on the zone visually and economically; investment in one part of the urban infrastructure is at the cost of another (or many); and the rise of big chains of stores means that lesser units will slip away. And, more widely, economic positives such as securing cheaper iron or grain from other countries inevitably damage local economies and industries, impacting on workers, lands and suppliers.

Meanwhile, more blatant negative changes – well recognised in the present 'age of austerity' – are marked by failures to expand or renew in space, diminished economic means and efforts to display, more efforts to recycle and reuse, and also private efforts to 'make do' and self-support, which could be marked by growing some of one's own food in gardens and in allotments but also by failing to maintain properties properly. In some circumstances this stagnation and restriction can rouse resentment and aggression – between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' – witnessed, for example, in graffiti, damage to property, break-ins, etc. which are responded to normally by a firm hand from the 'authorities'.

All of the above commentary, while obviously centred on a modern (and 'Western') context, has resonances anywhere now and also at any time in history and should be considered most fully when exploring a known period of stress, upheaval and change. Thus, for the fourth to eighth centuries AD across Europe and the Mediterranean especially, there were multiple well-documented transformations, some substantial and detrimental, primarily changes in control of whole provinces (these not always with swift transition) and in disruptions to old economic systems. Change could come on diverse levels, from impacts on society through

a new 'State' and authority or through religious change, to impacts on urban activity through social uncertainty and economic belt-tightening and to a loss of coinage in circulation. We might hear of impacts on an exposed frontier town and its lands and workers, or on a city regularly used for billeting troops, needy for food, space and equipment; or of a landscape that became dangerous through the settlement of barbarian groups and the movement of troops or through fort-building.

Such transformations did not all come at once and everywhere at the same time, and were nowhere uniform, arguably, with lesser impacts on some places and groups; nonetheless, over the damaged fifth and sixth centuries AD these wider changes were cumulative and pervasive, meaning that even if for some communities and places 'life just went on' without direct damage from warfare or raging priests, change still happened. Thus, a villa complex in mid-fifth-century Gaul might find, despite the ongoing fertility of the soils and the good local natural resources (water, sunshine, trees, wildlife, etc.) of its estate, its owner struggling as distant or nearby billeted armies required his grain; urban demand for his quality wine will have diminished as a battered provincial economy took hold; he might fail to work all of his lands as some of his slaves deserted; repairs to the villa buildings might be delayed or a lack of craftsmen counter good quality work; closure of quarries and brickworks through lack of demand likewise might lead to recycling of materials and spaces left ruinous; and a wider sense of insecurity might see that same owner and family prefer to retreat to an urban residence and try selling off the lands, for which the numbers of potential buyers might be much reduced. There might be diverse trajectories from this scenario: the owner might remain and 'make do'; a new owner might favour the lands but ignore the house, leaving things in the hands of tenant farmers to tend the fields and still generate the crops and produce; the owner might feel secure and invest – maybe in a chapel or equally in some tough farmhands who could double up as troops if needed; or the owner might be displaced by an incoming barbarian group and be killed or else negotiate. The archaeologies related to all of these scenarios will be slightly different, even if the basic image is the same – of continuity on some level, but of change/s on another, or many other levels.

Archaeologies of Transformations

Our challenge is very much one of interpreting these changes and trying to understand their causes and impacts – immediate or short-term and longer term. Archaeologists need to interrogate the often fragmentary or superficial material evidence with an open mind and to accept a range of scenarios – even where a destruction of a structure might 'fit' best into the context of a documented barbarian

raid on a certain place at a certain time. But, as (if not more) importantly, we should be trying to understand the *human* impact of the changes hinted at or highlighted in the material record: what did this fire do to the owners of this building? Were they killed in the episode? Why did they not return to rebuild? Who did the lands and ruins belong to after the event? Where a site is scavenged later – is that for possible lost possessions by the owners, or a rooting around by inquisitive teenagers? Is it scavenging by new owners looking for materials worthwhile recycling? What happens to the area overall? Is this one of many abandoned structures? Did this mean that locals avoided this area as a place of residence? Did it become one for dumping of waste instead? Was it less safe as a result?

It is, as said, easy to focus on the larger structural changes – these often being sluggish alterations, or at least ones hard to pinpoint to a set moment archaeologically – such as the decay of public spaces and buildings, and to build a picture of decline and transformation around those. For instance, observing how, 'in general, we see a gradual failure of public spaces and their colonisation by private buildings and workshops over the 4th to 6th centuries ...' or 'Field survey reveals a progressive loss of larger villas and the slow rise of village units between the 5th and 7th centuries ...' Certainly we need to combine such instances and forms of evidence, but it is important to do so with care and not to generalise, since each city and population in Late Antiquity differed in scale, role and content, and likewise each region and set of landscapes responded diversely to changes wrought locally and more widely. Sequences within a single province in the transition from Roman control to non-Roman rule will vary depending on multiple factors – in Italy, for example, the image suggested for the eastern Po Valley will not match that for the coastal north-west; the south of the Peninsula witnesses much less upheaval on military and economic levels, and so transformations in the fabric of both town and country here might be delayed, but these will vary much between inland Apulia and coastal Calabria, and between other zones, and so on.

The *trends* are important though and can give, therefore, guides to local reactions, impacts and responses, but we do tend to think of these too broadly – in other words, as changes undergone 'by the cities' or 'in the countryside' or 'along the frontiers'. There is often simplistic reference in urban contexts to 'public' and 'private' spaces, or else to (normally) anonymous elites and 'authorities' or to (named or unnamed) bishops, or in rural contexts to 'landowners and farmers'. And yet we are dealing with material changes, in built, buried, discarded or traded form and these were all undertaken by individuals. We might not be able to give faces and names to these users, workers, consumers and producers, but we ought to be spelling out more that the archaeology offers this route of understanding and insight. After all, when it comes to burials – isolated, suburban, rural,

in plots or in large community cemeteries – we are looking directly at such individuals and questioning their remains and contexts to understand their place in their contemporary societies and habitats.

In sum, we need to be thinking of people when considering the physical traces of transformations, since change is nearly always the result of human actions. Even when changes come as a result of ‘natural’ events, such as earthquakes and climate change, we are seeking to observe the human responses to these (sometimes localised, sometimes more widespread) episodes. Hence this volume’s title which explicitly talks of *Interpreting Transformations of People and Landscapes* in Late Antiquity and into the Early Middle Ages.

Types of Transformation and Related Data

What, though, are the ‘transformations’ that we face and try to tackle and interpret in this time period? Some have already been noted above, but we can briefly summarise some of those that contributors to this volume address and question:

- *Urban change* – The later Roman decline in secular investment; diminished investment in public spaces and buildings; redundancy of classical features; civic investment in defensive circuits (where towns persist); failure to equip and renew defences (where towns fade); ‘intrusion’ of burials (isolated or small groups) within the walled space; large town houses/*domus* fail and are often subdivided; private structures encroach on old public spaces; renewals of sites come from later seventh and eighth centuries – churches, palaces, walls, private houses.
- *The Church and towns* – Bishops installed in larger towns; episcopal complexes are inserted; rejection of pagan past; suburban shrines arise (dependent on possible martyr burials, etc.); church spaces increase from fifth century; lay aristocrats invest in churches; monastic spaces (urban/suburban, male/female); bishops often ‘leaders’ of towns by sixth century; burials (and relics) intrude in the urban context.
- *Rural change* – Heightened late Roman investment in some elite villas; lesser sites struggle; villa landscapes are fractured and broken in the fifth and sixth centuries; *vici* may grow; villages may appear; some hilltop sites emerge; monasteries are implanted; defensive structures as military *castra/castella* appear; small to large-scale cemeteries develop, attached to villages, forts or scattered hamlets; Church landownership spreads; rural churches increase (mainly from the sixth/seventh century); and, as a later feature, new elite foci emerge – ‘manors’.
- *Economics* – Shrinkage of international market; reduced penetration of imports from fifth century; rise of more local and regional wares; some residual ‘State’ trade and supply; changed building technologies – a growing

emphasis on recycling of materials, with robbing of urban and rural monuments; timber more commonplace, especially in rural contexts; coin use diminishes. Ceramics become more functional and of reduced types – chronologies become harder to narrow down. Within ‘Germanic’ contexts high quality metalwork circulates – dress fittings, accessories, weaponry. Food economies: scales of operation become reduced; exchange shows less variation; but storage facilities in villages and forts show active and industrious lands still.

Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages continue to be growing fields of archaeological and historical analysis and, accordingly, we can highlight that books and conference proceedings as well as single studies exist on various of these cited transformations. There are too many publications to cite, of course, but prominent are volumes in the ‘Late Antique Archaeology’ series (published with Brill) which has generated important collections on themes running from the late antique countryside (Bowden *et al.* 2004), to late antique paganism (Lavan and Mulryan 2011), technology change (Lavan *et al.* 2007), local economies (Lavan 2015; though this very much centred on ceramics), society (Bowden *et al.* 2006) and housing in Late Antiquity (Lavan *et al.* 2007) – each with wide geographical coverage to enable comparisons to be drawn. Readers should exploit these volumes, with their excellent introductory bibliographic essays to pursue transformation themes further.

A key feature of each of the above volumes is, naturally, the archaeological resource, its forms, strengths, deficiencies and new potential (from LiDAR to isotope analysis). Similarly in the present volume, which provides up-to-date considerations of themes and source materials, almost all of our contributors address the available archaeological – and textual – evidence, stressing issues in dating some events and sequences, in finds contexts and in how to read these data, but also identifying older misreadings of materials or, as importantly, the under-theorising of the materials to hand (e.g. Brogiolo, Arce, Meneghini, Vigil-Escalera, Ariño, Heeren, Seaman). Inevitably, calls are made in many papers for additional surveys, for more scientific approaches and for new research-oriented excavations (while highlighting the value of rescue work in opening up parts of the landscapes not sampled on any scale before – notably through road-building schemes). As a result, we all recognise that statements and ideas offered are interim or provisional and likely to be amended, enhanced, made more precise or even overturned – one of the exciting features of a discipline which literally uncovers more evidence constantly.

Powers and Identities

It is, on many levels, striking that only one of the papers (*Esmonde Cleary*) in this volume has in its title the name

of one of the new powers that held sway in the break-up of the Roman West. In reality the Visigoths are cited on a number of occasions in the papers on *Hispania* (*Arce*, *Ariño*, *Diarte-Blasco*, *Olmo Enciso*, *Vigil-Escalera*), while Anglo-Saxons are core to various of the debates raised in the Britain-oriented contributions (*Tompkins*, *Rippon*, *White*), and Lombards contribute to the changes discussed in northern Italy (*Brogiolo*, *Chavarría Arnau*). One might ask if this limited highlighting (in chapter titles) is significant at all? Arguably it is mainly a reflection of the fact that the vast majority of the contributors are archaeologists; a volume on the same theme by predominantly historians of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages would undoubtedly be more prominently populated by the names of the diverse powers – such as ‘Towns in Lombard North Italy’, ‘The Anglo-Saxon colonisation of ...’ and ‘Visigoths and Byzantines in south-east Hispania’.

The diverse emphases are logical based on the materials of study: texts generated by rulers (laws) or for rulers (histories, coins) or between rulers and their officials (letters), alongside Church-generated materials (*vitae*, homilies, letters, commentaries, etc.) which were chiefly for internal consumption and are variable in what they say (or don’t say) about the real, contemporary world; compared to excavated or surveyed materials, from urban sites and monuments to rural spaces, forts, chapels and burials, but including mundane (ceramics, animal waste) to prestige (gold brooches, chalices) items of material culture. The texts lean necessarily to the high, literate elite, from clerics and nobility to royalty, whereas the archaeology touches far more the whole social range and relate to a diversity of places and structures, not just cities and monasteries. Hence why the majority of the authors in this volume speak to broader themes – ‘Rural Settlements in ...’, ‘Transformation in the Cities of ...’ and ‘Landscape, Economy and Society in ...’ – and why broader social themes are questioned, such as ‘Spatial Inequality’, ‘Exploring Survival, Transformation and Ethnogenesis ...’ and ‘Changes in Topography and Population ...’.

Yet despite the general absence of the ‘power names’ in the titles of the bulk of this volume’s contributions, it will be seen that some do in fact play a part in a good number of the archaeological narratives considered, such as bishop Sabinus of Canosa in *Goffredo and Volpe*’s exploration of rural change and expression in southern Italy and Pope Gregory the Great as guide and reformer in the transformed Rome of c. AD 600, as discussed by *Meneghini*. The court aristocrat and major landowner Ausonius in the villa world of *Novempopulana* and King Euric in the transition to Visigothic landholding (*Esmonde Cleary*) and King Leovigild and his son Reccared at Recopolis (*Olmo-Enciso*) meanwhile are valuable as chronological pegs and guides for political markers in the landscape; while in other cases, especially military, the power names are distant, but resonate – as with distant emperors like Diocletian and Constantine

whose army reforms meant some reconfiguration of forts and troops along Hadrian’s Wall (*Collins*) or vastly alter a frontier’s role and population (*Heeren*). However, often the actual names and promoters are not known – while there are plenty of saints’ names in sub-Roman and early medieval Wales, we cannot assign names of these or of their royal kin to specific defended sites (*Seaman*); likewise for the post-imperial chiefdoms built around forts on Hadrian’s Wall (a landscape lacking the mass of wandering Welsh holy people), we might only guess at whether (unnamed) former *limitanei* forces took royal titles and installed feasting halls or chapels in their headquarter bases (*Collins*).

Running through most, if not all, of the papers is a question of identity – an explicit questioning of how new identities were forged (*White*) or negotiated (*Tompkins*, *Esmonde Cleary*) or redefined (*Collins*); of a residuality of Roman bonds and preferences (e.g. *Seaman*); of new statements of identity, whether through names, language (e.g. *Rippon*), building style (*Raynaud*, *Heeren*), site choice (*Diarte-Blasco*) or burial (*Chavarría Arnau*). However, often we may struggle to pinpoint one identity: the material record (*Tompkins*) and especially the burial record (*Chavarría Arnau*) exhibits in this timespan an array of forms and practices, which shows that, often, form (of burial, but equally of materials, house style, village design, dress and traditions) will be multiple too, dictated by locale, population, roots and outlook – which are all things hard for us to trace and understand.

A common denominator, of course, is the Church and Christianity, which we might anticipate as a ‘glue’ to link many of these communities, whether urban or rural, living or dead, rich or poor. Some authors here duly flag this ‘coming together’ (e.g. *Arce*, *White*, *Chavarría Arnau*, *Brogiolo*) and we are told in various papers of the appearance of churches, chapels or even monasteries (e.g. *Goffredo and Volpe*, *Diarte-Blasco*); however, it will emerge that there is generally a delayed Church arrival in the rural sphere, suggesting that a firm glue was first needed in the towns, notably in terms of bringing the residual elites ‘on board’, before the less orderly landscape could be made more orderly and observed. A longer continuity of villas and villa elites might have speeded up this process, and we do see some instances of churches on or adjoining villa sites, but often the erection of a church or monastery is a later event – once a villa complex has become largely ruinous – slowly filling some of the gaps left by a displaced rural elite (*Raynaud*, *Vigil-Escalera*, *Arce*, *Diarte-Blasco*). The post-villa landscape was, it seems, for a while at least one without clear identity in many territories; the Church was then a vehicle for re-engaging the diverse communities in these.

Chronologies

The loss of these villas, the decay of public buildings in towns, church building work, the formation of defended

sites, changes in burial rites, the breakdown in economic display – these and others are all threads in the papers in this volume, but it is important to observe the variations in chronologies expressed for these aspects of transformation. In part they roughly relate to the simple ‘ending of Roman rule’ and ‘the stabilisation of a new power’ pattern, which varied across the old Roman West, and which had different players and trajectories depending on diverse factors. For example, change might impact quickest, potentially, at the larger urban sites, especially the capitals, those subject to power changes and conflict (cf *Brogiolo, Meneghini*), and slowest at towns more peripheral to the core of, for example, the Visigothic Kingdom (*Diarte-Blasco*). Cities where royalty chose to make its mark might also see a mark in their immediate landscape (as exemplified for Recopolis – *Olmo-Enciso*), although the converse might also be true, with rival rural elites shifting away, leaving a royal hinterland less active-looking. A key need, therefore, is to expect variations in chronologies, with sequences not duplicated precisely or closely from one town or region to another. Hence the value of a city-based territory field survey (*Ariño*) or a close study of burials (*Tompkins, Chavarria Arnau*), which can reveal a range of patterns of continuity, change and redefinition from one zone to another.

One can observe how the archaeologists of this volume embrace broad spans in their chapter titles – ‘... from the Late Fourth to Seventh Century ...’ and ‘... Late and Post-Roman Wales’. Obviously, such wording links into the volume’s aims to explore themes especially within ‘Late Antiquity’, which itself can be viewed as an extended (or shortened) timespan, whether AD 300–700, AD 500–700 or AD 400–600 (our contributors are noticeably different in their chronological parameters!), and which might be part-designated as ‘early medieval’ by some scholars. But it also reflects how for many archaeological (and historical) questions related to ‘transformation’, it is essential to look to roots and later trajectories and trends in order to understand and contextualise the data, whether a building, a village economy or a burial rite. The transformation can indeed be simply temporal: for example, the deposition of items, whether possessions or offerings, within graves is seen to diminish over time. But this might happen earlier in one region compared to another, which might be connected to the arrival and take-up of a new norm or directive, which might be rigorously pursued by one community (or leading figure, whether secular or cleric) but resisted (consciously or unconsciously) by a neighbouring group. Analysis of the archaeological evidence from a variety of necropoleis of diverse sizes, spans and status is thus required to bring out and start to understand such trends before seeking to qualify and question these chronological variances (*Chavarria Arnau*).

We must bear in mind throughout, of course, that most archaeological chronologies are not precise. Even when we

obtain a set of scientific – e.g. C14 or dendrochronological – determinations, such as for individual bones and burials and for preserved wood from coffins, normally these will give only a few fixed (or near-fixed for C14 dates, even Bayesian-calculated) points within a wider whole. We might then be able to chart changes/modes/preferences/choices at specific points for specific inhumed/cremated persons and tombs, but without being able to securely assign the same choices to others, who will have died a decade or more before or after those ‘fixed’ examples, and who might have had different socio-economic circumstances.

For the most part we still rely on assigning dates through associated material culture which itself can rarely ‘offer’ fixed dates, since we cannot say when in a date range of, say, c. AD 550–650 a certain type of storage jar was produced and how long it was used for. For some areas in the Early Middle Ages, such as Wales, ceramics are seemingly non-existent, or elsewhere can only be assigned broad chronologies, with forms changing little for many centuries (*Seaman*). As shown in various of the papers in this volume, we require a combination of finds types to enable trends and transformations to be properly framed, yet always remaining aware of issues noted above about regional and even local variances (cf *Ariño, White, Vigil-Escalera*). Towns, for example, are all individual in their trajectories: they may conform on a broad level to trends – such as Roman foundation, Roman high, late Roman downturn, post-Roman struggle – but, as highlighted for case studies in *Hispania* especially, the ‘high’ for some towns might come in the first century AD or only in the second, dependent on status and elite presences; the ‘downturn’ in terms of the decay of (certain – which ones can differ from place to place) public monuments can likewise begin in the fourth century, or even in the third (*Diarte-Blasco*). Like burials, the contents (human, material, status) of towns always vary and so will their individual responses to wider changes (cf *Brogiolo*). As a result, whatever statements are offered by the contributors here will normally be couched with provisos that more evidence, new excavations, additional scientific analyses, etc. will be required to strengthen the chronologies and conclusions presented.

Geographies

Perhaps this volume paints with too broad a brush for some tastes, going from whole countries (*Arce* on *Hispania*, *Rippon* on England) to fairly substantial blocks of territory such as northern Italy (papers by *Brogiolo* and *Chavarria Arnau*), Inner or north-eastern Spain (*Vigil-Escalera Guirado* and *Diarte-Blasco* respectively) and southern Gaul (*Raynaud*), or targeted but broad swathes of land (the Lower Rhine, explored by *Heeren*; Hadrian’s Wall, examined by *Collins*). Yet for all of these, there is strong recourse to a selection of examples that give voice to the wider images being portrayed – case studies especially of well-excavated sites

– or, as in *Chavarría Arnau*’s discussion of burial types and trends, an array of sites (variously sampled) which have been collated as part of a research project seeking to bring coherence and dialogue to the mass of archaeology done on late Roman to early medieval burials and cemeteries.

There are also more tightly-focussed site-based and regional analyses here, which might be viewed on the one hand as enabling a closer understanding of specific populations and their settlement trends, and on the other hand as providing materials (i.e. case studies) to be fed into wider panoramas. For Spain, city–territory relationships and structural expressions over time are charted and questioned for Salamanca (*Ariño*) and Recopolis (*Olmo-Enciso*); in England, *Tompkins* uses two main sites in the Avon Valley to explore population identities across the late Roman and early medieval divide; and in Italy, *Meneghini* takes us into the changing cityscape and populations (and their mentalities) of post-classical Rome, whose scale remained substantial, but much reduced and altered.

For geographies we must also highlight how many papers put sites and people into context: it is essential when exploring a settlement, its population and its economy over time, to understand something of the lands and resources available and how that environment changes. These local and regional geographies are being explored through environmental archaeologies (studies of animal bones and archaeobotanical remains being core here, although the latter still appears underdeveloped in its actual collection and analysis in some regions) and with palaeoenvironmental data drawn especially from pollen cores. These studies enable significant new readings of wide landscapes and possible change (or not), as *Rippon* explores in the later Roman to early medieval transition in England, or more micro-regionally as for Hadrian’s Wall, where fair continuity argues for fair continuity of people in that place (*Collins*) or around a new urban foundation in central Spain (*Olmo-Enciso*). And, as *Brogiolo* shows, such data are key for intra-urban contexts, to reveal changing urban environments as urban control weakens in the post-Roman period. Elsewhere, understanding soils, land-use and settlements clarifies late Roman strategy and success for villa ownership in Gaul (*Raynaud, Esmonde Cleary*) and for zones of higher Romanised investment as in Wales (*Seaman*); and, as *Heeren* reveals, an ‘empty’ but militarised frontier zone on the Lower Rhine forms a conduit for food to the troops from elsewhere.

Connected to this is the presence/absence of towns as both prompts/hindrances to the development of certain types of rural settlement: towns too (or at least their founders) sought out good, economically-viable spaces and their presence and markets stimulated a market and rural geography; weaker urbanism reveals a less intensive, but sometimes more focussed rural landscape – as evident in parts of southern Italy (*Goffredo and Volpe*), *Hispania* (*Diarte-Blasco*) and *Britannia* (*Seaman, White*) marked either by new, scattered sites, sometimes grouped, and also by the creation of upland foci.

Communications

An aspect closely attached to the ‘geographies’ noted above and a theme that merits future closer consideration, is communication. Archaeologists will, based on material finds – ceramics, glass, animal bones, etc. – often refer to trade and exchange, but little more is then really said of such contacts between communities, markets and (travelling) merchants. We do not know how such contacts operated and how markets functioned: should we envisage many members of a family loading carts to attend a rural or urban market? Did such become family events? We neglect to think of the means of transport, the pack animals, the horse- or cattle-drawn carts, the needs for sacks or containers, etc., and we very much neglect consideration of the actual routeways – tracks, paths, old roads – utilised. How safe were these routeways? Did travel always happen in groups for safety? Did some farmers settle alongside some roads to benefit from small-scale trade and to provide things like fodder, food and wheel repairs? Some of the papers in this volume talk of settlements that lay along key routeways and emerged as stronger industry-oriented foci (such as the ‘aggregated settlements’ or *vici* discussed for southern Italy – *Goffredo and Volpe*; different of course are military road guards – *Heeren*); or else those created in the latest or post-Roman centuries which ‘avoid’ the old roads or of other new sites, such as hilltop settlements, which ‘dominate’ road lines (*Vigil-Escalera*); and some contributors refer to burial grounds that served and thus linked dispersed farms and hamlets. But these are generic statements which do not really help determine how roads and routeways actually functioned. While some work has been done on the continuity or otherwise of Roman roads and of road-stations (*mansiones, stationes*) (see papers in Basso and Zanini 2016), much more can be done to question communications and communities in the late antique and early medieval periods, and to theorise connectivity (Note that even the volume edited by Catteddu *et al.* 2011, despite the congress’ theme title of ‘On the Road Again. L’Europe en mouvement’, features minimal comments on roads and communication in its many otherwise excellent papers. However, one publication very much centred on how roads can be studied is Szilágyi 2014, considering early to late medieval routeways in east-central Europe). But I would stress that this gap in research is not a major criticism – it is just a nudge towards new and targeted research directions that will feed into and deepen our understanding of people and their places in the post-classical and early medieval past.

Understanding how Communities Functioned

An end question to my contribution would be: Are we learning much more or anything new about people in the late antique and early medieval periods? Arguably each element of the archaeology of settlements that we consider from our often diverse specialisms feeds into how we view and

interpret past populations, whether on a personal/individual or household level through to a community (urban or rural) and an institution one. Excavation of a grain silo – a common and multiple component on post-classical rural habitats in the Spanish Peninsula especially – is a telling example in this regard: these give an archaeologically-tangible insight into food in terms of gathering in and storing produce; they talk of daily and even seasonal storage strategies; these could be for individual families, but they often seem to link into community strategies; beyond that they denote a mode of organisation and management – communal manpower for harvesting, drying, etc., but also some leadership to order such work and to plan out community needs and surpluses; they give insights into yields from the community's environs and, where botanical remains can be collected, help show the types of crops grown and point to staple diets; from these remains and from silo numbers and capacities we can compare communities, and perhaps identify hierarchies of wealth and efficiency. What we can only guess at are values – how was land owned and how the goods linked to individual farming families; whether surpluses would be traded for money or other goods and/or services; and whether a portion was yielded to a local church or to some local lord and at what frequency?

These questions and issues could all be tackled more fully and explicitly and yet such studies find greater resonance in prehistoric studies, with too little application for historic eras (see papers in Groot *et al.* 2013. However, important first steps for the post-classical epoch occur in the collected papers in Vigil-Escalera *et al.* 2013). Some such explorations are indeed being done increasingly in medieval contexts – and I can cite here recent volumes in the 'Ruralia' series with individual conferences and volumes centred on essential aspects of community functioning and society, notably on agrarian technology (Klápšte 2016), water management (Klápšte 2005) and arts and crafts (Klápšte and Sommer 2007), and even, most recently, on ritual and belief (Bis-Worch and Theune 2017). Thus it is hugely rewarding to observe that similar efforts are being generated already on early medieval contexts in Spain, in the series 'Documentos de Arqueología Medieval' directed by Quirós Castillo, with collected studies on themes such as demography and society (complexity and inequalities) (Quirós Castillo 2016; see also his single-authored 2016 volume) and the production and consumption of ceramics (Vigil-Escalera Guirado and Quirós Castillo 2016). It is clear from such works and from some of the contributions in this volume that work in this Peninsula is starting to set new agendas for studies of late antique and early medieval society and settlement and their diverse transformations, promising to make these periods of study even more an arena of fruitful debate.

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Transformation in the Cities of Northern Italy between the Fifth and Seventh Centuries AD. Forms, Functions and Societies

Gian Pietro Brogiolo

Introduction

Between the fifth and sixth centuries, urban landscapes changed in almost every centre within the territories of the old Roman Western Empire. That they changed following similar patterns is an aspect to reflect on, because it suggests similarities in contexts different in terms of geography, timeline and history. In fact, transformations in planning and control, architecture, production and consumption, assessable in terms of urban, social and economic landscapes, occurred at different times and were sometimes triggered by accidental factors, some short and catastrophic such as destructions following conflicts or earthquakes, others longer, caused by gradual environmental changes. The ‘end of the ancient city’ was a general phenomenon, variously brought about by numerous factors, single or concurrent, which undermined its economic and market functions (elements only revived and redefined later on, between the ninth and tenth centuries), but also marked by the end of the aristocracies of Late Antiquity. Yet urban seats did endure, linked primarily to the fact that these could continue to be seats of power, in the form of the bishop and of the new authorities and elites of the barbarian kingdoms; combined, these replaced the city curias. Expressions of these new powers were installed in the Episcopal quarter and in the *palatium* respectively, and these, alongside a wider proliferation of Christian topography (other churches, funerary sites, relics, etc.), became the landmarks of the medieval city. These replaced the fora, baths and entertainment buildings which had constituted the foci of the ancient city, these robbed or bypassed in the ceremonies, processions, habits and activities of medieval urbanism (Dey 2015).

Yet, alongside these elements, in order to ensure social cohesion and to provide an urban or civic identity, there was

a need for defence and defensive walls in the fifth to seventh centuries, defining active urban centres as well as territorial *castra* and *castella*. Underscoring their importance leads to interpretations which contrast with historiographic positions currently held by numerous historians and archaeologists. Thus discussion and reflection here on this issue is not only appropriate but also required to escape from the perspective of a single way of thinking on which has been based a good part of contemporary historiography.

The focus of this paper is on urban transformations in northern Italy, a geographical area which has seen some good urban archaeology whose results reflect well processes recognised more generally across the old and former Roman Western provinces. My case study region is also valuable for the centuries under consideration since a very distinctive aspect is the evolution of urban hierarchies, marked in particular by the shifting of its capital, first of all in the late Roman Empire, then in the Ostrogothic Kingdom, and finally under Lombard rule (Brogiolo 2000).

New Urban Landscapes

The many and diverse structural changes to cities between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages have been traced and documented on variable levels by 40 years of urban excavations in the north of the Italian peninsula; these transformations are widely known, but not always fully understood, and with sequences known better for some territories than others (Fig. 1.1). I shall restrict myself here to summarising conclusions which have been detailed elsewhere (Brogiolo 2011, whose geographical coverage extends across the whole western Mediterranean (Italy, southern Gaul and Hispania). The processes of change highlighted in this present analysis can be split up between

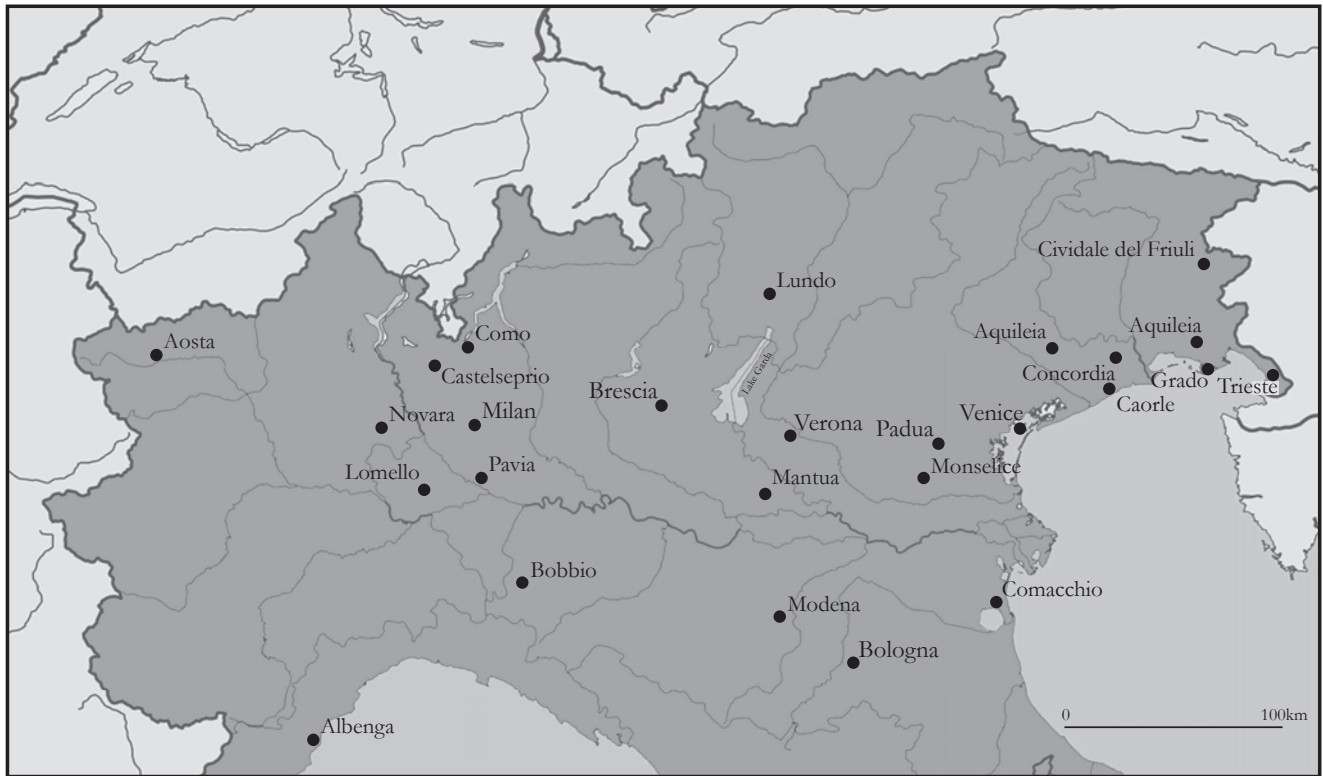


Figure 1.1 Early medieval sites in northern Italy cited in the text (image: author)

those which determined the end of the ancient city and those which contributed to building and characterising the medieval urban form.

The first processes comprise the *destruction, dismantling and re-adaptation* of infrastructures (roads, aqueducts, sewers and harbours), public monuments (temples, fora and administrative buildings, places of entertainment, bath complexes) and private *domus*. Some buildings were demolished in order to extract re-usable materials to build new ones (e.g. the robbing of the *Capitolium* at Verona); others, deprived of their role and of upkeep, were left to slowly decay; whereas others still were ‘cannibalised’ and adapted for new functions (such as Verona’s arena or amphitheatre, colonised for craft activities and houses, and that of Padua for houses; while in Aosta and Trieste, the bishop’s complex was installed in the former forum spaces).

Yet the same timespan also saw townscapes enhanced or remodelled with *new* elements which would go to define the early medieval and medieval city in Italy: (1) defensive works made up of moats/ditches and walls, which often required re-working of ancient urban curtain walls that had become neglected or had fallen into disuse (as at Verona, where the Republican circuit needed to be rebuilt), and which sometimes saw the defining of a reduced urban area (one well known example of this reduced cityscape is Bologna); (2) diverse centres for the administrative military power (notably the bases of counts and dukes who first

join with and then replace the administration of the *curia*); (3) churches as landmarks of a growing Christian urban topography; (4) production activities installed in the city, but not always in defined areas; (5) a modified funerary world, which tends to shift from the suburbs (where it had been confined in the classical city context), into different places within the townscape, but which, by the end of the Early Middle Ages, was gathered around specific churches; and (6) new types of buildings: large edifices, masonry buildings (these preserve of lay and ecclesiastical aristocracies) and lots of huts/wooden houses which replaced (and often overlay) ancient wealthy urban town houses or *domus*.

However, as outlined below, this evolution of (and into) the early medieval city was locally modulated according to variations in the urban hierarchies, these themselves the result of changing historical contexts.

Historical Contexts and New Urban Hierarchies

In northern Italy, between the fourth and seventh centuries, the many and varied historical contexts, often turbulent, impacted on most regions as well as individual cities, changing the position of the latter within a more general realignment of hierarchical patterns.

The onset of change is linked to the transference of the Roman imperial capital from Rome to Milan in AD 282 (where it remained until 402), prompted by the serious

military situation of the third quarter of the third century, with the dual military front opened in the East by the Sassanians, who inflicted serious defeats, and in the West more widely with the raids into Italy of the Alamanni, which were only halted and repelled in 268 south of Lake Garda. The anxieties and threats of these raids can be linked directly to the restoration of the urban fortifications of Verona in 265. The emperor could in fact force the cities to build walls at their own expense; in the case of Verona, this was done by Gallienus. The feat, as proudly proclaimed in the inscription over the main gate, was completed in just eight months according to the instructions of the *dux ducenarius* Aurelius Marcellinus (*CIL*, V, 3329). The short timespan involved may relate to the fact that these works were primarily a question of strengthening the wall of the Caesarean period through the addition of new towers, alongside basic repairs of the main curtain (see Cavalieri Manasse and Hudson 1999).

A more serious situation for northern Italy occurred after the defeat of Roman forces by the Goths at Hadrianopolis (AD 378), which marked the start of a phase of widespread strategic State re-organisation which included: (a) the subsequent transfer of the capital to Ravenna in 402; (b) the hierarchical re-aligning of key cities (in particular Pavia, Novara, Como, Brescia, Verona and their districts) to be more directly tied to Milan and the coastal, north Adriatic centre of Aquileia (plus a reinforced Cividale del Friuli); (c) the foundation of new, militarily strategic centres (see Vanesse 2010; Brogiolo 2014), which are archeologically documented by the *castra* of Lomello (Brogiolo 2015) and Castelseprio (Brogiolo 2013), built on two main roads leading from north and south to the capital, Milan. The investment made for these works was considerable (over 25,000 m³ of defensive walling) and the job was undertaken by skilled workers (from the army), using, for both of the cited sites, a particular type of mortar similar to pozzolana. Such investments were notable, but difficult in the first half of the fifth century when, following the settlement of groups of barbarians in many regions of the West, the State revenue lost a sizeable part of its taxes, meaning that, according to Peter Heather, the State was no longer able to directly pay for urban fortifications (2013, 438–440). However, we would argue that in reality it did continue to fork out (some) money – as documented by the inscription set up in honour of Flavius Constantius for works at Albegna on the Ligurian coast in the 410s (*CIL*, V, 7781) – whenever local resources were not available.

In this re-organisation, those centres which had gained more elevated strategic roles received special attention – but to the detriment of other, more marginal cities which went into decline (like those which Bishop Ambrose of Milan in 387 called *urbium cadavera* – see *Epistolae*, PL, XVI, 39, col. 1099). Strategic re-organisation thus resulted in a new urban hierarchy which would remain largely unaltered until the start of the sixth century.

In the early period of subsequent rule in Italy by the Ostrogoths (from the 490s) the policy of reinforcing the defences of a number of strategic cities, best attested at Verona, Pavia and Brescia, and the building of new fortifications in the Alpine regions, was King Theodoric's answer to the expansionistic aims of the Franks after the destruction of the Visigothic Kingdom of Aquitania (507). This event also enabled Theodoric to extend his kingdom (which, besides Italy, excluding Sicily and Sardinia, which were then in the hands of the Vandals, stretched from coastal Dalmatia to Pannonia to Noricum), as far as *Hispania*, this under a form of Ostrogothic protectorate that enabled Theodoric even to collect taxes. A key feature of Ostrogothic rule was the active collaboration with the Roman aristocracy, who continued to manage the administration through the city *curiae*, with the aid of *comites*, *iudices* and *duces* who held military power (this wielded exclusively by the Goths) and also shared civil, judicial and economic power with the city bishops, who, we can observe, little by little, took over the functions of the *curia* – a process which was quicker in some cities than in others (see Fauvinet-Ranson 2006; Porena 2012). The *curia* as a body was already clearly in difficulty by the fourth century due to the impoverishment of the *possessores* and it was made more evident in the attempt by the State to remedy the problem through the establishment of the post of *defensor civitatis* (designed to replace the curial system when it was in difficulty and to combat the arrogance of the *possessores*).

In the second half of the sixth century, cities and *castra/castella* were the prime reference point for written sources (narrative and documentary), both for those territories in the hands of the Eastern (Byzantine) Empire, and for those conquered by the Lombards. For the former, the late sixth-century *Descriptio orbis romani*, attributed to George of Cyprus (Gelzer 1890), lists five *eparchies* = *provinciae*, still under imperial control after the partial Lombard conquest. Two of these (the *Annonaria* and the *Aemilia*) concern northern Italy. For the Lombard Kingdom likewise, later sources (at the end of the seventh century, the *Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia*; and towards the end of the eighth century, Paul the Deacon) indicate the same articulation as well as some confusion between what made a city and fortress; well-known is Paul the Deacon's (*HL*, II, 9) appellation '*castrum vel potius civitas*' in referring to *Forum Iulii* – Cividale, capital of Friuli). As seen in George of Cyprus' lists, the term *civitas* still evidently identifies or equates with the capital of a coherent or distinct administrative district; however, this could be an ancient city or a more recently built *castrum*. Some forts, therefore, were transformed (officially, presumably) into administrative and tax-collection centres; these roles might be archaeologically proven by the discovery of coin weights (as found in Castelseprio but also in some forts in the Trentino), of large quantities of burnt cereals (as at

Lundo) and of buildings which arise outside of the fortified complex which might signify new attendant settlement and market duties. We can identify instances of this extramural growth at Castelseprio, whose so-called 'borgo' connects to the famous frescoed church of Santa Maria *foris portas*, and at Monselice where about 15 churches were built on the slopes running down from the hilltop fortress to the foot of the hill (Brogiolo 2017).

It is agreed by scholars that the organisation of the bulk of the defensive works in northern Italy – urban and military – pre-date the Lombards. But how far back in time does the splitting up into districts dominated by *castra* and the fragmentation of the territory of the ancient cities actually go?

North of Italy, Eugippius, in his *Vita Sancti Severini*, describes the chaotic situation of the Noricum provinces around the mid-fifth century: we hear that the forts or *castella* were defended by demoralised soldiers whose pay had stopped arriving from Italy and who were constantly under attack by diverse enemies. In view of this situation, the inhabitants first of all sought refuge in other defended bases, including cities or else surrendered themselves as taxpayers to the barbarians (*Vita Sancti Severini* 27, 31; cf Christie 2004, 20), but ultimately many of them fled to Italy with their belongings, while their enemies, 'searching for gold, even opened up tombs' (*Vita Sancti Severini* 40).

A territorial articulation of the Ostrogothic frontier defences is recorded in Procopius (*Gothic War*, II, 28) who recalls the *comes Sisigis* who commanded a number of *castella* in the Cottian Alps before their takeover by the imperial armies during the Byzantine-Gothic War; Sisigis is perhaps the same individual later named by Gregory of Tours (*Historia Francorum*, IV, 44) and by Paul the Deacon (*HL*, IV, 3) as *Sisinnius magister militum* and based in the fortified city of Susa. At the time of the Frankish invasion, between 574 and 583, the district of Lagare in the central Alpine Trentino region was governed, in a seemingly independent way from the Duchy of Trento, by the Lombard *comes* Ragil (*HL*, III, 9). At the end of the seventh century, the itineraries of the *Ravennatis Anonymi* and of *Guido* describe the *castrum/civitas* of *Ligeris/Lageris*, cited immediately after the *civitates* of Sirmione and Garda, as 'not far from the Alps' (*Cosmographia*, IV, 30).

Certainly during the Byzantine-Gothic War, groups of fortresses were managed by a military authority; but from the end of the sixth century some of these are documented also as civilian power centres with bishops and with dependent territories. This re-organisation probably dates back to the war years or its immediate aftermath as the imperial/Byzantine forces sought to restore the much damaged peninsula. A precondition in this sense had already existed in the involvement, construction and perhaps even management of the *castra/castella* by the *possessores* and city *curiae*, with social consequences in the formation of

the new communities. Indeed, we might imagine many of the *possessores*, while still owning much land, preferring to reside in these defended sites; certainly we see none of the fine villas of the fourth century still active in their monumental form by the mid-sixth century.

A further major transformation of the cities followed the Lombard arrival in 569 and their subsequent conquest of the north, extending into the seventh century (Brogiolo 2011). This Lombard invasion and takeover marked not only a fragmentation of the Italian territory – for example, the coasts of north-west and north-east Italy remained, for a generation or more, in imperial/Byzantine hands, whereas the Po valley and Alpine districts became largely Lombard-held – but also, for Italy as a whole, severely damaged the society and institutions of Late Antiquity. Did warfare and insecurity wholly change Italian society in the towns? Can we see more 'Roman' components enduring in those territories still held by the Empire (whose control was stronger in the south, where more towns remained imperial)¹ and are Lombard-held cities much different? How can archaeology contribute to this question of presumed radical urban change?

The End of the Urban Society of Late Antiquity

Three material aspects enable us to reflect on social change in the city: the end of the *domus*, products and consumption patterns. The end of the *domus* meant not only the loss of expression of a way of life, but also the disintegration of the aristocratic families who, until the first half of the sixth century, had run cities through the town *curia* and expressed their urban authority through these luxurious urban houses. An evolution that began in the fifth century (with the political and military events that led to the end of the Western Roman Empire), underwent a period of stabilisation during the reign of King Theodoric, but was accentuated with the Byzantine-Gothic War and collapsed with the Lombard conquest.

As this late antique ruling class fell away, so we observe the arrival within the city of diverse and many groups of craftsmen, a class of workers which in classical Roman times had largely been sited in the suburbs. These artisans were mainly involved in metallurgical activities (using ore brought from the mountain mines as in the case of Brescia, or in the recycling of metals extracted from ruinous buildings, including furnishings, as evident at Padua), or set up pottery workshops or lime kilns which exploited the carbonate stones of the decayed/robbed ancient Roman monuments. The effects of such robbing and attendant industrial activities on both the ancient urban fabric and in terms of environmental pollution. But to what extent was this loss of public buildings and their fittings and the intrusion of industrial workshops the result of disorganisation or, rather, the result of choices made by the new ruling classes?

Strikingly, the crafts areas were often located in public spaces (such as in the *Capitolium* in Brescia, and between the arches of the Arena/amphitheatre of Verona) which should imply that they therefore were dependent on decisions taken by the authorities (who increasingly included bishops and clerics) who now governed the cities. Some workshops also ‘colonised’ former *domus*, but what is not known is whether (and how) these former private residences, like those excavated at Santa Giulia in Brescia, had come to be public property. Certainly the crafts overall point to cities actively recycling the past to fuel a different present.

The evolution of urban consumption patterns was somewhat more complicated. For northern Italy, archaeological studies have contributed much to efforts to reconstruct economic trends through the distribution patterns of imported and local ceramics, especially jars and *terra sigillata*: until the seventh century, trade was open to Mediterranean, African and Oriental products; then it shows a different development between the Byzantine coast (from Ravenna to Istria) and the kingdom of the Lombard duchies. At the coastal centres, imports continued at a fairly constant pace throughout the Early Middle Ages, as testified by the widespread presence of globular jars and the glazed ‘Forum Ware’ ceramics of the eighth and ninth centuries. However, within the peninsula and in the cities of the Lombard Kingdom, Forum Ware was totally absent while amphorae and *terra sigillata* were only sporadic arrivals. Even in major cities such as Brescia and Verona after the seventh century (and indeed up to the twelfth), ceramic household goods were limited chiefly to jars and jugs, all objects of a regional market, in which a direct relationship between the city and its dependent territory often prevails. A comparable situation also existed in Central Italy (in general, see papers in Cirelli *et al.* 2015).

In attributing a value to these data, however, we must take into account that ceramics were no longer representative of the actual economy after the sixth century AD. Written sources, in particular the Treaty of 715 between the trading emporium of Comacchio and the Lombard King Liutprand, indicate stable trade relations for many products which were transported up the River Po and its tributaries as far as the port where royal officials applied ‘ripatico’ and ‘toloneo’, both taxes paid for the transit of craft and for landing/docking. It was not just cities that exploited the ongoing trade, since important rural monasteries like Bobbio could also participate, with direct relations with coastal and riverine trade cities. Thus, in the ninth century, in Genoa, one of Bobbio’s cells procured oil, salt and *garum* (fish-sauce); in Mantua, one of its farms was linked to a port where, every year, 15 Venetian ships would dock with a cargo of pepper, cumin and linseed, while salt for preserving the fish in the Mantua fishery came from Comacchio (*Inventari*, 131).

This theme of trade identifies how we should be cautious in assessing both the archaeological resource (which is

unable to document most of the goods which have left no material traces nor any of the early medieval vessels that sailed the rivers) and the written sources (how many goods did the 15 Venetian ships which sailed to Mantua carry?). Until we are in a position to quantify (which is not impossible, but difficult because it requires much systematic analysis), the problem will remain open, although I believe that Chris Wickham (2005) is correct when he says that a complex trading system is the consequence of strong demand, from wealthy aristocracies, and an efficient tax system – conditions which, at least in Lombard northern Italy, would appear to have ended in the second half of the sixth century, when the aristocracy of Late Antiquity had become replaced by a military elite which also wielded civil and judicial power.

The Impact of Natural and Catastrophic Events and Climate Crisis

In our modern-day context, the systematic destruction produced by ongoing wars (notably that against Isis in Syria and Iraq) and the impacts of climate change are widely reported and bemoaned. There is nothing strange, therefore, in the fact that the topic of ‘catastrophe’ is prevalent in current historical debates by both historians and archaeologists. In the conference on the sack of Rome by Alaric in Rome (410), optimistic readings were put in opposition to more complex interpretations of the partial destructions suggested by archaeology (see papers in Lipps *et al.* 2013). Rather more dramatically, Roberto Meneghini (this volume), attributed the decay and fall of Rome to a cumulative series of disasters – from war to disease to famine to earthquakes – which might have hit the city in the sixth century, at double the rate of other periods.

In this context, northern Italy of the fifth and the sixth centuries is a very representative theatre of discussion. According to extant written sources, some cities did in fact suffer heavy destruction, first of all in the early fifth century during the Visigothic incursions, then 50 years later with those of Attila, and finally, during the Byzantine-Gothic War of the AD 530s–550s; one key episode stated by the Byzantine author Procopius saw the reputed massacre of as many as 300,000 citizens of Milan by the Goths (Procopius, *Gothic War*, II.21). In the case of Aquileia at the head of the Adriatic Sea, the city’s reported destruction by Attila’s forces would seem to be confirmed by traces of a fire and a hoard of coins hidden around 450; a consequence of this would seem to be the considerable reduction of the city’s outer walls. By contrast, in Brescia, the traces of burning and destruction, found in various parts of the city, according to the archaeological data now available, seem to refer to the sixth century, most probably in the context of one or more episodes during the Byzantine-Gothic War. In sum, while the data are not substantial or secure, it seems inappropriate to

reject the written sources *a priori* when these underscore, for some cities at least, the traumatic effects of war, pestilence, earthquakes, floods and other natural events.

Similarly, the importance and impact of environmental changes have been stressed for some time now for northern Italy, especially in certain regions and cities, particularly in the Po Valley and on the eastern coast. Moreover, thanks to the development of disciplines which analyse and interpret the ‘eco-facts’ brought to light by excavations, more and more data are being accumulated on changes affecting the environment, climate and people’s diets. On an individual city scale, palaeobotanical data (based mainly on pollen and charcoal) and geomorphological analysis can help to illustrate some of the internal and external transformation processes. For example, at least from the Byzantine-Gothic War period, the interiors of towns and cities featured scatterings of cultivated zones, described by documents as an alternation of inhabited areas and spaces for gardens, fields and intra-urban pastures. This is an occurrence which seems to have affected all cities (sites with good associated archaeological support include Brescia, Bologna and Padua), and which enables us to explain these changes in terms of the abandonment of some *insulae* or some marginal areas or the reutilisation of open spaces (these spaces appearing through depopulation, likely due to warfare plus reduced economic strength). Implemented by means of imported soil from the hinterland or via waste landfills, these cultivated and open spaces were enriched by the natural fertilisation of grazing animals or by artificial fertilisation for the more intensively cultivated areas, such as vegetable gardens (Nicosia *et al.* 2013, in relation to analyses of such ‘Black/Dark Earth’ deposits).

More generally, through remote analysis and targeted geo-morphological assessment, environmental archaeology can reconstruct the evolution of settlements both in the heart of the Po Valley (such as Modena, for example, which has seen systematic study since 1988: Cremaschi and Gasperi 1988) and the Adriatic coast (several research teams have focused attention on the lagoons of Grado and Venice: Gelichi 2015a). The hydraulic network which in Roman times assured medium- and long-haul routes between the hinterland and the Adriatic Sea seem to have suffered major setbacks towards the end of the sixth century, and we need to understand whether this was a consequence of the worsening climate characterised by high rainfall and cold, as many scholars assume. For example, the severe flood of AD 589, described by both Pope Gregory the Great (a near contemporary) and, much later, Paul the Deacon (*HL*, III, 23), but about which Squatriti (2010) has expressed scepticism, and which is reported to have caused the diversion of the River Adige, was seemingly just one episode in what was a prolonged period of ‘natural’ disruption. Deposits of several metres of alluvial gravel which settled on surfaces previously in use in Late Antiquity have been found in numerous cities: Concordia, Modena, in the south-

western suburbs of Brescia, and to the east of Verona, where the flooding of the Adige produced a 2 m thick alluvial accumulation above the Roman layers (Brogiolo 2015, with related bibliography). But it is unclear to what extent this dramatic flooding was caused by lack of maintenance and control of the river banks, of terrace systems and of water control generally after Rome’s breakdown; this might have been a response to longer term issues. But this breakdown in control may have been decisive for those river courses which, in the late sixth century, fell within the opposing jurisdiction of the Empire and the Lombards, thus preventing any orderly maintenance of their banks. In some areas, like in the Grandi Valli (‘Great Valleys’) of Verona, the Lombards were unable to address the environmental disaster and thus abandonment prevailed; in others, like the lagoon of Venice, there was greater resilience and adaptation which saw a process of new foundations of settlements develop which led, in the space of two centuries, to the birth of Venice (Gelichi 2015b and 2016).

The New *cives* – Forged by the Church and by the Defence of the City

Agnellus, who composed a history of the Church of Ravenna in the early ninth century (see Deliyannis 2010), recounts a couple of very significant episodes about the society which had taken shape in his city after the disintegration of the ancient aristocracies and about new forms of solidarity and representation woven by the populace. At the end of the seventh century, on the Sunday of the Apostles, for example, we are told that the *cives* used to be drilled outside of the city walls, fighting ‘*sine causa*’ and aggressively until one of their members was killed (*Liber Pontificalis*, lines 361–362). Agnellus claims that all the city’s residents took part in these ‘war games’, regardless of their social status, whether nobles, *mediocres et parvuli*. Organised into neighbourhood teams, these defined according to the 12 city gates, they represented new social groups which might seemingly take independent decisions, such as when, in 709, Agnellus reports that they revolted against the high imperial governor, the Exarch (lines 369–370); while in 725, they combined to defend the city of Ravenna during the siege by the Lombard army of King Liutprand.

This system of urban civic participation dated back at least to the fifth century, when it was under the jurisdiction of the *praefectus urbis* and concerned the defence and upkeep of walls, towers and gates (*Cod. Theod.: Nov. Valent.* 82, of 5 March 440). Cassiodorus, in the early sixth century (*Variae*, VII.7, 8, 29; IX.17), recalls the *vigili portarum* and the *custodientes portas civitatis*. In those still imperial (Byzantine) territories, in the Early Middle Ages, the cities were also responsible for recruitment to the armies (*Lib. Pont.*, I, 404: *Pentapolenses et Venetiarum exercita*). Lombard law, meanwhile, makes a distinction between the

field army (*in exercito ambulare*) and the *sculca*, which was engaged in the defence of cities and fortresses (Rothari, 21), provided with walls which people were forbidden from crossing '*sine notitia iudicis sui*' (Rothari, 244). The rule has been interpreted in relation to compulsory military service (Majocchi 2015), although in the same legal chapter reference is made to the three social grades of freeman, *aldius* and servant (to which different fines were applied).

In Lombard lands, the tasks of recruitment on a city basis is recorded by other rules which required of the *duces* and *gastaldi* (royally-appointed officials who governed the cities and *castella*) to give possible exemption to the *exercitales* from performing compulsory military service (Liutpr., 83, dated AD 726; Astulf, 2–3, dated 750, on modes of recruitment). And this is also mentioned by Paul the Deacon (*HL*, V, 40) in relation to the battle of Coronate between King Cunincpert and the usurper Alahis who had gathered around him, and bound them with an oath, the armies of some Lombard cities. This recruitment system endured up until at least the ninth/tenth or even eleventh centuries, when counts, marquises and bishops took charge of compulsory military service (Majocchi 2015, 141–143; Settia 2006). The sources do not tell us if, as in the case of Agnellus' Ravenna, all social groups were called upon to defend their cities and thus whether that includes the Romans (i.e. native Italians or non-Lombards) to fight alongside the Lombard *exercitales*. However, given the extent of many city walls and the large number of towers and gates to be guarded, calling upon all fit and able citizens would be logical.

In conclusion, the defences of early medieval urban centres not only point to their military importance and their material image, but also highlight their growing impact on social organisation. Through the involvement of the *cives* in the maintenance and defence of the walls, 'groups of solidarity' came to be formed which, if the example of Ravenna can, as I believe, be extended to other cities, had as their geographical reference point the (nearest) gates, which often came to be named after neighbourhood churches.

This relationship between gates and churches is part and parcel of the more general construction of a Christian topography, long considered to be a basic element of the medieval town (cf Chavarria Arnau 2009). The question in itself is quite complex and in northern Italy it is even more so since Arianism survived there until the end of the seventh century, and consequently religious unity was only achieved in the course of the eighth century. Until then it is plausible to believe that a stronger element of social cohesion was represented by the defence of cities and fortresses. This defensive focus was highly necessary on many occasions: during the various stages of the conflict between the Lombards and the Eastern/Byzantine Empire at the end of the sixth and early seventh century, and during the raids of the Avars in the early seventh century. In all these episodes of war, the strategy of those under attack

was to take refuge in the cities and fortresses, generally avoiding open conflict. In contrast, in Byzantine cities this civic solidarity had been all associated with the Church since the conquests of Justinian. It would be subsequently so also in the Lombard cities; it is not by chance that the first source which expresses this clearly is the praise poem, the *Laudes mediolanensis civitatis*, of Milan, dated to AD 739, in which the core elements of the city are the walls protected by the churches, the *robusti cives* which defend them, and the secular and ecclesiastical aristocracy, now, at least, a merger of Romans/Italians and Lombards which was headed by persons directly linked to King Liutprand (*Versus de Mediolano civitate*).

Conclusions

The disintegration of the classical city took place at different times and for different reasons depending on the region. In North Africa and in some regions of Hispania, it can be claimed that this had already begun in the second century AD, when those new urban creations, of propagandistic nature, failed to find any financial support because actual resources were either lacking or because local (elite) society was no longer interested in these euergetic acts. This same core factor may well be behind the abandonment of various lesser urban centres in the Emilia region described in the late fourth century by Milan's Bishop Ambrose. Whereas, in the same centuries, many other cities actively sought to preserve and maintain their public buildings and their monumentality. But from the fifth century the ancient or classical city model began to be abandoned in the terms that I have described earlier. Economics may have played a role as it did in previous centuries, not only in terms of a marginalisation of certain regions and the loss of social mechanisms/processes, but also in terms of the wider financial crisis of the Roman State, deprived of its North African 'bread-basket' after the Vandal conquest of the 420s (which may well be the greater cause of the fall in Rome's population from one million inhabitants in the fourth century to about 50,000 in the mid-sixth, as estimated by Meneghini; see this volume) and of the tax revenues in those former provinces now collected by the lords of the new or emergent barbarian kingdoms. The lack of local and state resources may also have prevented the wider recovery of cities damaged by warfare and/or natural events.

But we also need to recognise another element of change in the late antique cities which impacted on their society, its ideals and its lifestyles and which came to change the monumental face of the urban centres – the Church. Indeed, many scholars (among them Javier Arce and Roberto Meneghini, who reiterated this view in the conference related to this volume – see Chapters 3 and 2 respectively) attribute much change to Christianity. While I would agree that, in the long run, it was the Church which shaped the

emergent medieval city form, my own paper prefers to stress the importance of the militarisation of society in Late Antiquity, prompted, as discussed, by numerous upheavals and insecurities. This interpretation goes against the ideas of, for example, Volker Bierbrauer (2008) and Aldo Settia (1993) who argued that the fortresses (*castra* and *castella*) of northern Italy had been built by the local populations, and against those views more recently put forward by Tiziana Lazzari (2009). Presenting at the Spoleto conference in 2008 (and reaffirming this in Lazzari 2015), she began with a definition of the meaning of ‘*castrum*’, with the clearly expressed intention of ‘first of all reviewing the importance of the Lombard invasion in the ruralisation process and, above all, the militarisation of the area’ (2009, 628). To achieve this, the term *castrum* is given the meaning of territory and not of fortified settlement, which ‘significantly downsizes the military and fortification concept’ (*ibid*, 646). This conjecture was later also extended (by historians and archaeologists working in Bologna and Venice) to the ‘*castra*’ of the Venice region, from Comacchio to Caorle, built, according to tenth-century sources, by refugees from those cities conquered by the Lombards in the seventh century. If there are no fortresses there is no militarisation, and so borders are open to men and goods; Lombards and Romans merged rapidly, creating a shared culture.

But in my view, by comparing the archaeological data and written sources, it can instead be shown that: (1) a defence of the territory centred on both the cities and fortresses was in place (but not all at the same time) well before the arrival of the Lombards; (2) new defensive systems were erected by the imperial/Byzantine forces along the coasts: thus, in the lagoons of Grado and Comacchio about a dozen castelli are mentioned by sources, even though the only structure so far materially documented in the sixth century is the *castrum* of Grado;² (3) military recruitment was entrusted to those officials who administered cities and castles and this continued throughout the Early Middle Ages; and (4) as Andrea Castagnetti (1982) has previously highlighted, a substantial institutional and socio-cultural difference persisted across the Early Middle Ages between the territories of the East Romans/Byzantines and those of the Lombard Kingdom.

This interpretation also denies the validity of the proposal, first made for Italy, and more recently for Spain, of a ‘chaotic’ settlement model, according to which the changes were introduced by social groups ‘released’ of power. I do not share in this idea and believe that a strong power-base had always been present and effective – in cities, through the management of defences and of public spaces/monuments, and in the countryside, through fortified sites firstly, and then by controlling mineral and agricultural resources, these managed by the royal and ducal courts.

The importance of defence, led by the State but gradually bolstered by the input of the local populations, most clearly took resources away from the preservation of the decaying

monuments, which in any case were no longer required by the new elite, leading to the well-known consequences of material transformations of the ancient cities: on the one hand as a process of disintegration/fragmentation of the old system, and on the other as the development of different ways of social display, dictated also by new forms of solidarity in terms of defence. And this solidarity probably became even stronger later on in the cities of the Lombard Kingdom and of the Frankish *Regnum Italiae* of northern Italy thanks to the developing strength of the Church and its patronage which helped generate the distinctive ‘medieval’ image of the city.

Notes

- 1 One issue to note is how historiography has unjustly obscured the ‘Romans’ of these imperial-held territories by calling them ‘Byzantines’, effectively making them appear as foreigners, while the non-Germanic populations in the Lombard Kingdom are classified with the bland name of ‘natives’, to contrast with the new barbarian elite, whereas, in actual fact, they still had an identity of their own, grouped around the Catholic bishops, and still used Roman law.
- 2 These fortresses were recorded as all being under a single authority, namely a duke, who moved his original residence or base from Cittanova (active from the early seventh century to 750), first to Malamocco and eventually, in the early ninth century, to Rialto where the Venice we know today later developed – see Gelichi 2015b; 2016. Seven of these fortresses were also home to bishops who had quitted their original mainland sees after they were captured by the Lombards during the seventh century.

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Rome. An Analysis of Changes in Topography and Population between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages

Roberto Meneghini

Introduction – A Shrinking Rome

Between the late fourth and early sixth centuries, townscapes and their social characteristics changed drastically across the whole Roman and late antique world. The profound changes that affected the city of Rome at this time, both in terms of its buildings and its gradual depopulation, emerge clearly from the work of four of the most significant contemporary historians and scholars: Ammianus Marcellinus, Cassiodorus, Procopius of Caesarea and Pope (Saint) Gregory the Great.

The first of these, Ammianus, when reporting the visit of the emperor Constantius II to Rome in AD 357 in his *Res Gestae*, described a city which had not really changed much from previous centuries, with a substantial population ranging between 800,000 and 1,000,000 (the question of population size is summarised in Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 2004, 21–24; see also Durlat 1990, 116–117 and, more recently, Lo Cascio 2013), and with its splendid ancient monuments in a good state of preservation and still awe-inspiring. In particular, the Imperial *thermae* are highlighted, hyperbolically defined as ‘large as provinces’ (Amm. Marc., XVI, 10.14: ‘*lavacra in modum provinciarum exstructa*’).

A century and a half later, under Ostrogothic rule, Cassiodorus (*Var.* XI, 39) also mentioned the *thermae*, but with these now abandoned, suggesting a major demographic decline had affected Rome, whose population is estimated by some scholars as down to c. 50,000 inhabitants. This was the first time that Rome was presented as an ‘empty’ city, with its open spaces and buildings oversized for the number of its inhabitants. Next, the Byzantine chronicler Procopius (*Bell. Goth.* III, 22) in 547 described the city as still intact, but completely deserted as a result of Totila’s deportations (removal of troops, taking of hostages, enslaving of groups) in the drawn-out Byzantine-Gothic Wars.

Half a century later, Pope Gregory the Great likewise lamented the disappearance of the people and also of the Senate from the once Eternal City: strikingly, he records for the first time the ruinous state and the destruction of some buildings (*Om Ezech.* II, 6, 22; *Dialogi* II, 15, 3). At this point, the surplus of space had probably already led to an abandonment and avoidance of large areas of the city, even though the ancient urban fabric had remained mostly intact. The vast cityscape was now characterised by dispersed occupation, as testified by the presence of scattered burial sites inside the city walls.

Archaeologies of Building Loss and Change

Thanks to the large amount of archaeological information about the early medieval city collected in the last few decades, we have a clearer idea of the state of Rome’s monuments across this period of time (while we discuss these below, their history can especially be found in Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 2004, with bibliography). We now know, for instance, that the modern ruinous state of the southern side of the Flavian Amphitheatre/Colosseum is due to the fact that medieval robbing occurred only in that sector, possibly to keep in place the complex’s northern half as a piece of monumental urban scenery. The fora of Caesar, Nerva and Trajan did not suffer from serious damage until the eighth–ninth centuries, when the ruinous paving of the Forum of Trajan, for example, was still being roughly repaired with cobblestones. In the Forum of Nerva, the temple of Minerva was retained almost as a monumental backdrop for the area, which became an aristocratic quarter from the ninth century; the temple disappeared only in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century (Horster 1984). The Temple of Peace was destroyed by fire in the mid-sixth

century, but by this time the area was already occupied by the basilica of Santi Cosma e Damiano; a large area of the abandoned temple was later taken over by the church's *diaconia*. In the Forum of Augustus, the Temple of Mars Ultor had already disappeared at the time of King Theodoric in the early sixth century, when it was demolished to obtain building materials.

The Roman Forum did not change much until the eleventh century, when various buildings here started to be systematically demolished. The surrounding pavement level also started to rise (in part due to occasional flood or alluvial deposits and some possible artificial dumps) and in a couple of centuries this vast complex had been partially buried under three or four metres of soil. To the west, the religious complex of Largo di Torre Argentina was transformed into a monastery during the sixth century.

Many of the rich aristocratic and senatorial residences on the Caelian and Aventine Hills were seemingly abandoned after the barbarian (Gothic; Vandal) raids of AD 410 and 455. The large imperial *thermae* can be seen to have generally gone out of use in the fifth century, as attested by Cassiodorus (see above): this seems to be confirmed, at least for the Baths of Trajan, by archaeological evidence which reveals how the conduit supplying water to the vast tank or cistern of the Sette Sale became blocked during the mid-fifth century (Carboni 2003). The *insulae* in the Campus Martius and on the Viminal Hill, as well as the ports on the Tiber River, were gradually quitted by the declining population.

The collapse of some structures, the dumping of materials, sediments accumulated as a result of flooding of the River Tiber, and the practice of robbing ancient monuments to obtain building materials or metals for melting down all led to an irreversible decline, loss and masking of these buildings. Signs of this process can indeed be traced archaeologically, such as attempts to counter the rising surrounding ground level and to keep the *insula* of the *Ara Coeli* accessible by constructing infill-walls.

While burials likely indicate zones of scattered occupation over the ancient cityscape, a good proportion of Rome's inhabitants gradually moved towards Trastevere and the area of the Velabro, whose port was still functioning. Potentially, population shifts might be linked to the 'pull' of churches in the suburbs and in key sectors of the old city.

In my opinion, the turning-point in the urban development of post-classical Rome can be identified when the papacy became independent from Byzantium in the eighth century. Henceforth, the pope had complete control over the development of the built city and over the welfare of its population. It is noteworthy that the highest number of (documented) restorations of ancient buildings occurred during the second half of the eighth century, such as in the pontificate of Hadrian I. Many of them were transformed into churches and some into *diaconiae*, established for the distribution of the Church's charity; a total of 18 *diaconiae*

existed in Rome, including that of St. Paul/St. Angel in Pescheria, which was built over the *Porticus Octaviae*. Elsewhere within the City, however, other complexes became quarries for building materials. Indeed, systematic robbing in this century seemingly led to the re-appearance of the building style of *opus quadratum*, given the wide availability of tuff, peperino, and travertine blocks quarried from platforms and enclosures of demolished temples, sanctuaries and public buildings.

Changed and Redesigned Populations

The social 'personality' of the city of Rome and of many other urban centres also substantially changed across this period, with the traditional meeting points – such as the amphitheatre, circus, theatre, and even the forum – gradually substituted by churches and by participation at Christian religious ceremonies. Thus, the Filocalian Calendar of AD 354 for Rome indicates that only ten days a year (all in December) were dedicated to the *munera*; this contrasts sharply with its record of 101 days of theatrical plays and 66 days of races in the circus (Stern 1953; Marcone 1981; Salzman 1999). Gladiatorial games were therefore clearly in decline during the fourth century and Sunday shows were banned, perhaps to avoid overlapping with Christian ceremonies (Gregori 2001, 24–25); this is suggested by a sermon of Saint Augustine (*Sermones* 51) dating to 417 or 418 that blames a *dies muneris* for the limited number of people attending the Sunday mass.

From the early fifth century, when there were still public gladiatorial games (see discussion in Rea 2002, 130–132), the *munera* were slowly transformed into hunts – man versus animals (*venationes*) or animals against other animals – which endured at least until the first half of the sixth century. The degree of violence diminished too, due to the costs of importing and tending wild and exotic beasts and to the difficulties in their supply (notably through the loss of North Africa to the Vandals from the 430s). Interestingly, the amphitheatre of Carthage was still functioning at the start of the sixth century, although it was apparently used then only to host shows of acrobats (Hugoniot 2008, 175–176). The Flavian amphitheatre in Rome went out of use in about 523, as testified by a letter of Theodoric mentioning what were probably the last *venationes* that ever took place in its ancient arena, by now wholly buried (Rea 2001, 235; Rea 2002).

The ancient sources, such as the well-known description of the Roman plebs by Ammianus Marcellinus (XXVIII, 4.29–32), make it clear that the Eternal City's citizens were passionate about races in the circus and for theatrical plays. Saint Augustine (*De civ. Dei*, I, 32) criticised the (largely wealthy) Roman refugees who arrived in Carthage after the sack of Rome in 410 for spending their days at the theatre and Salvian (*De gub. Dei*, VI, 12, 60–71) accused them of

encouraging the populace of Carthage to go to the races while the Vandals were seizing the city in 430. When the Ostrogothic King Totila reconquered Rome in 549, we are told that he organised horse races for the few people still living in the city and for his army; however, we do not know if these took place in the Circus Maximus (which would then have looked like an empty, and no doubt overgrown shell) or somewhere else (Procop., *Bell. Goth.* III, 37). Furthermore, we know of riots between supporters of different factions in Rome in 509–511 (Cassiod., *Var.* I, 27; 31; 33), at a time when these groups were probably very small in a city of about 50,000 inhabitants.

Many Christian writers, especially in the eastern part of the Empire, viewed games in the circus as conveyors of witchery, paganism and moral depravation (e.g. Salvian, *De gub. dei*, VI, 11, 60–61). Despite this, it should be observed that the hippodrome in Constantinople remained in use, with its highs and lows, up to the end of the twelfth century (Vespignani 1994, 49–54). In North Africa, during Vandal rule, games are documented as taking place between 439 and 533, while the circus of Carthage remained in use until the mid-sixth century, into the early decades of Byzantine rule. However, from the early seventh century, the building was in time occupied by a cemetery and private houses (Hugoniot 2008, 166).

We lack textual references to chariot races in Rome after those organised by King Totila in 549. The demographic decline implied a drastic reduction in the number of users and specialist personnel alike, plus, of course, in funds to support these, all thereby affecting the maintenance of theatres, circuses and the amphitheatre, as well as of the large Imperial *thermae*, thus progressively sealing their fate. The Colosseum, built for 50–70,000 spectators, was probably now too big even to host the entire population of Rome. And we should very much doubt that there were skilled enough engineers to keep in operation the complex hydraulic systems that had formerly allowed the supply and discharge of water to and from the Baths of Diocletian, Caracalla or Trajan.

The Church and Rome's Reconfigured Social and Funerary Topography

When these large entertainment establishments disappeared, new meeting places with strong Christian connotations started to appear and large gatherings of people now came under the aegis of the Church. Indeed, a generation after the races organised by Totila, the social scenario was radically different. The cultural transformation from paganism to Christianity was complete, so much so that it affected anthroponymy too. For example, citizens who lived during the fourth and fifth centuries were still called *Porclaca*, *Salsula*, *Leopardus*, *Urbicus*, *Tigrinus*, *Capriolus*, *Piperius* and *Tzintina*, as testified by Ammianus Marcellinus, by the

Edict of Tarracius Bassus, and by funerary epitaphs; but in the works of Pope Gregory the Great, we find names such as *Cumquodeus*, *Herundinis*, *Redenta*, *Aniellus*, *Deusdedit* and *Pasqualina*. This suggests a shift from the mostly pagan world of small businesses, spectacles in the amphitheatre and daily subsistence, all typical of the late Roman/antique city, to the Christian onomastics of early medieval Rome.

Gregory of Tours (*Hist. Franc.* X, 1) and, much later, Paul the Deacon (*Hist. Lang.* III, 24) report that in 590 the entire population of Rome took part in a procession organised by Gregory during a severe plague. For this event, the pope divided the city's residents into seven groups, who sang a litany for 'seven voices'. From that time on, processions and religious ceremonies appear to have become prime occasions for public meetings in the West and in Rome in particular. Indeed, the *Ordo Romanus primus*, the first of 15 directories recording the history and development of the papal liturgy in Rome, very likely dates to the sixth century; it contains the description of processions towards the city's station churches as well as lists of their associated ceremonies (Atchley 1905).

The celebration of mass in the sixth century, especially the Gallican rite (which almost wholly disappeared in the Carolingian Age), included the reading of the names of the deceased members of the community as if they were still taking part in the ceremony (Atchley 1905, 100–102; Ariès 1980, 168f). This familiarity with the deceased was probably facilitated by the fact that aristocrats, prelates, monks and nuns were already being buried in churches and urban monasteries by this time, as attested both by Gregory the Great (*Dialogi* IV, 27, 2; 49, 7; 55; 57, 8–16) and now by archaeological evidence.¹ Thanks to their proximity, the dead were therefore still perceived as a living part of the community.

We might say that from the late sixth century the material and symbolic presence of the deceased became usual for western societies, especially for those living in cities, which in less than half of a century had abandoned so many of the values of classical and late antique societies and embraced Christian culture and mentality. In Rome, this familiarity, together with the large amount of intramural space now available and the abandonment of the catacombs as burial loci during the fifth century, seems to have been the prompt for the gradual appearance of urban cemeteries, steadily substituting burials in churches, in suburban basilicas and in the necropoleis *sub divo* around them, which were still being restored at the end of the sixth century and maintained in many cases until the seventh century.² Based on an episode narrated by Gregory the Great (*Dialogi* IV, 27, 2–3), it appears clear that people could decide whether to be buried in the city or in the suburb: initially, the organisers of the funeral of *Cumquodeus*, a lawyer, wanted to bury him *apud beatum Ianuarium martyrem*, near the Via Praenestina, but at the last minute they opted for his final resting-place

at the church of St. Sistus, along the urban section of the Appian Way.

As people of the Greco-Roman world lived their daily life surrounded by myths and scattered multiple deities, the reality of the Christian folk of the Middle Ages was permeated with miracles and supernatural events, linked to the sacred and to the afterlife. This reality remained unchanged until very recently, especially in parts of rural southern Italy, and has been recorded and studied by anthropologists during the twentieth century (see, for instance, De Martino 1958 and 1959; Lombardi Satriani and Meligrana 1989). From such accounts, we can catch a glimpse of the existential dimension of believers living in a world dominated by the divine presence and by the unknown, where people constantly sought to dispel fears linked to an unresolved relationship with death and with the dead. In this sense, we can see a strong link between the stories reported by Pope Gregory the Great and modern oral traditions from rural areas, which talk about ghosts asking for salvific or reparative actions for the living or revealing their fate in the otherworld.

In a world where grief was handled wholly in the domestic sphere or among small parish communities, people experienced a daily relationship with death, which entered the collective imagination; indeed, the perceived line between life and death became very thin. Unlike the Roman world, where the deceased were confined to extramural cemeteries and nocturnal wayfarers got scared of getting too close to the tombs and to their supernatural inhabitants (*lemures* and *larvae*), contacts between ghosts and the living in medieval stories happen within the walled space of towns and cities and inside churches. This probably mirrors the real situation of the end of the seventh century, since archaeological investigations reveal that urban burials became a common praxis in this period. For instance, in Pope Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* (e.g. IV, 42, 3; 57, 3–7; and IV, 57, 8–16), ghosts take a physical body and serve the living population to atone for their sins; they tend to appear at night, just as in Charles Dickens' or more modern ghost stories.

The significant phenomenon of urban burials in Rome, typical of many other ancient cities in the Early Middle Ages (fifth–eighth centuries AD), has been previously discussed by Santangeli Valenzani and myself, drawing on archaeological discoveries (Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 2004, 103–125). However, investigations carried out since this publication have increased the number of funerary sites from 85 to 96, revealing how widespread was this practice (Fig. 2.1).³ These new discoveries, mostly from rescue excavations inside the Aurelian Walls, allow us to update the numbers of burials from known sites and to add about 100 new inhumations to those recorded in 2004 (*ibid.*, 105–106 and fig. 83), giving a grand total of almost 600 burials. However, this is probably only 0.29% of the

200,000 estimated burials for this period, at both urban and extramural sites. This is based on the average annual mortality rate of 4% established by Durliat (1990, 122, fn 208): his basis was a population of 50,000 inhabitants between the second half of the sixth and the second half of the seventh centuries, the period when this phenomenon reached its peak.

The new data shed some light also on the problematic origins of this practice, forbidden in Rome since the most ancient Law of the Twelve Tables. The number of sites securely dating to the fifth century has increased from four (nos 6, 46, 63, 83) to five (+ no. 95) and we now have a site dating from the late fifth to the early sixth century (no. 90). This seems to indicate that intramural burials started to appear much earlier than the mid- to late sixth century, from when this practice became widespread.

Burial site 87, near via Petrarca, is particularly significant since it probably dates to the fourth century⁴ – if so, a very precocious sign of the change in mentality regarding funerary practices that started to 'shorten the gap' between the living and the dead. In this regard, we can mention the law (*Codex Theod.* IX.17.6) issued by the emperors Gratian, Valentinian and Theodosius on 30 July 381, which required the removal of any human remains out of the cities. This has been often taken as evidence for an early attempt to discourage urban burials, and the tomb in via Petrarca might offer some archaeological confirmation for the reasons behind this law.

Our understanding of the suburbs of Rome between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages has also increased in the last few decades. Following the abandonment of villas and of burial within the catacombs during the fifth century, the epigraphic evidence suggests that extramural basilicas and funerary sites remained in use at least until the end of the seventh century (Pergola *et al.* 2003).

Beyond urban confines, funerary sites might also occupy spaces in abandoned villas, although very little is known about the people buried there. It has been hypothesised that these small necropoleis were used by seasonal workers, descending from mountain or upland villages to work in the fields during the busiest periods of the agricultural year (Santangeli Valenzani 2013). Similar figures, called 'guitti' and 'coloni', continued this tradition until the beginning of the last century (Metalli 1924, 113–114, 119–124). Seasonal workers probably lived in temporary wood houses, similar to the huts typical of modern 'butteri' and farmers of the Roman Campagna. Alternatively, they might have used parts of the abandoned villas as makeshift shelters and small cemeteries, these easy to identify by their proximity to still visible ruins. Judging from the number of burials, however, this was a limited phenomenon, which did not improve the general feeling of emptiness, desolation and danger that characterised the Roman Campagna almost until modern days.

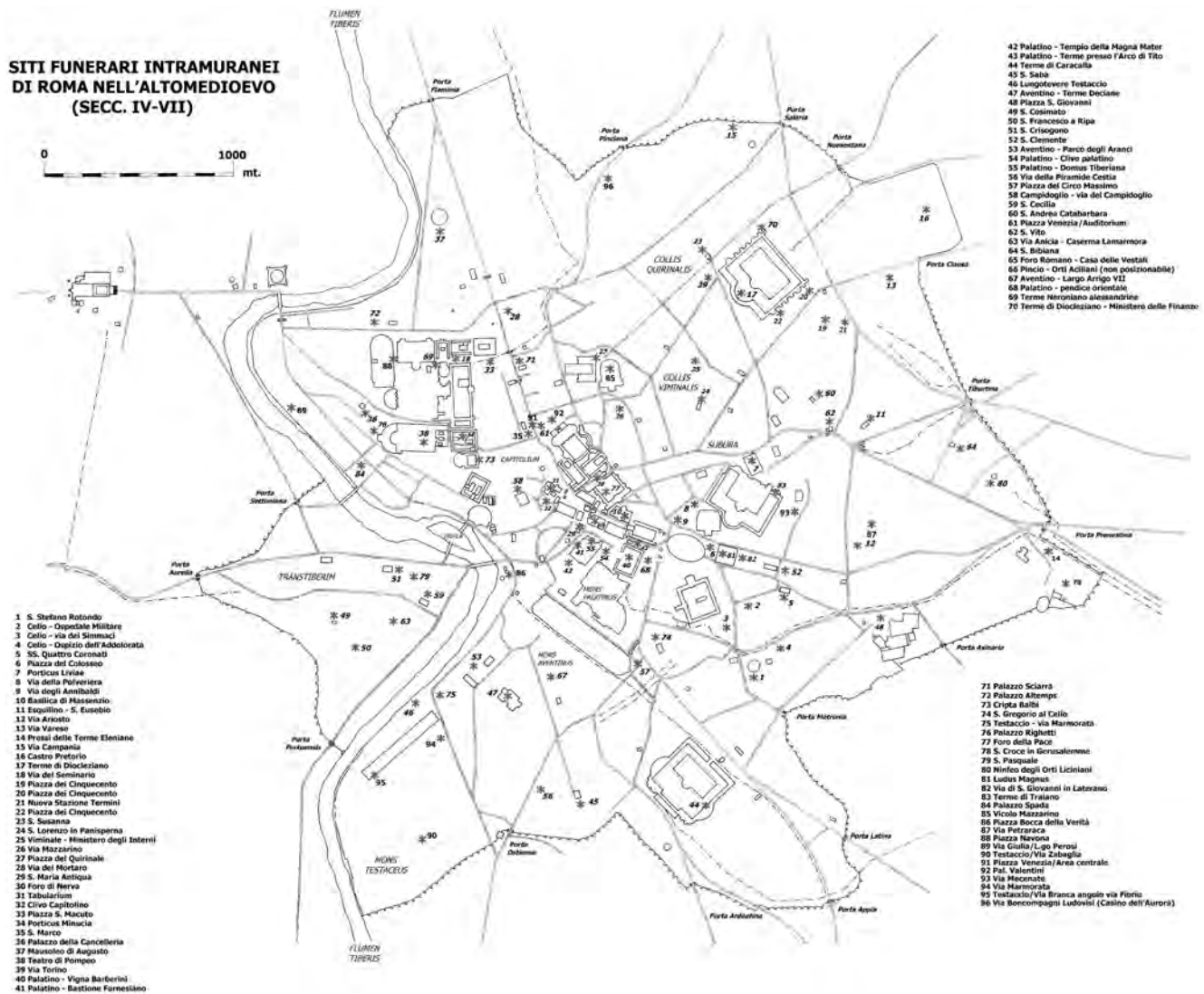


Figure 2.1 Distribution of the currently known urban funerary/burial sites in late antique and early medieval Rome (fourth–seventh centuries AD) (image: R. Meneghini)

Urban Change beyond Rome and the Impact of Natural Disasters

How does Rome fit with wider trends that impacted on townscapes between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages? To answer this, I next briefly analyse the archaeological evidence for 46 cities and towns of central Italy, delineated from Florence to Paestum, which have produced a relatively good amount of data for this crucial time period.⁵ Seventeen out of 46 of these sites can be claimed to have been abandoned between the fifth and the tenth century (36.95%). Eight of these were re-occupied before the end of the tenth century, while 20% of the original sites completely disappeared. A total of 28 towns out of 46 became smaller or were partially abandoned (60%) and 24 continued to be occupied until today; 15 urban centres, a third of the total, survived because they were transformed into Byzantine or

Lombard/Longobard *castra* or *castella*. Finally, three sites (6.5%) were relocated before the end of the tenth century.

Urban burials, dating from the fourth till the eighth centuries, have so far been found at 31 of the 46 sites (70%). At five towns these burials appeared already in the fourth century and continued until the sixth–seventh centuries. Their peak (11 sites) corresponds to the period between the sixth and the seventh centuries – matching the data for Rome.

Combined, the data suggest that in Late Antiquity, and in the second half of the sixth century in particular, several Italian cities, now reduced in size and in population, became what we might term ‘urban villages’, most with intramural burial sites. These changes indicate a substantial and widespread demographic decline, testified by archaeological and written sources alike. One famous example of the latter

is the heartfelt description of Rome by Gregory the Great as ‘an empty city’ (see note 4).

There is good scope to argue that epidemics and environmental changes substantially contributed to this phenomenon of urban decay. If we consider all of the documented epidemics and famines that affected the Roman and Byzantine Empires between AD 304 and 750, a strikingly high figure of 222 cases is registered: 38 occur in the fourth century, 41 in the fifth century, 83 in the sixth, 38 in the seventh, and 22 in the first half of the eighth century (Stathakopoulos 2004). The highest proportion of these natural disasters occurred during the sixth century, and of the 83 events recorded for this century, 39 (almost half of the total) happened between 535 and 553 – the period of the Byzantine-Gothic War (Stathakopoulos 2004, fns 91–129, 265–301). Seventeen out of 39 affected directly Italy, where 12 famines, seven epidemics plus an exceptional weather event are recorded over a period of just 18 years. The latter has been identified with the effects of the eruption of a super volcano, perhaps the Ilopango in Salvador or Krakatoa, which in 536 ejected such a mass of material into the atmosphere as to obscure the sun for 18 months, with inevitably tremendous repercussions on agricultural productivity across the world (Stathakopoulos 2004, fn. 92, 265).

The impact that these phenomena had on the peninsula and cities of Italy can be easily understood considering that, while 222 events were distributed over 450 years, with an average of an event every two years, the 17 recorded between AD 535 and 553 took place on average almost once every year. According to Stathakopoulos’ review, then, the frequency of epidemics and famines doubled during the Byzantine-Gothic War. Furthermore, Italy was that area of the Byzantine world that suffered the most from these events across the entire period under study, with 16 famines and 15 epidemics during the sixth century alone (Stathakopoulos 2004, 32, table 2.4, 34, table 2.5).

The frequency and virulence of these events prevented any possible recovery or ‘normalisation’ – a phase that tends to follow a single crisis when the balance of the social and economic systems come to be restored (Bacci 2012, 340–341). The long war between Gothic and Byzantine (plus Frankish) forces, plus, later, the Lombard invasion of Italy, countered any such possible revival.

The situation was further exacerbated by the impact of several earthquakes. Considering the distribution of these in our timeframe (see Guidoboni 1989), we can see how the Mediterranean Basin was affected by 110 large earthquakes: 31 during the fourth century, 26 in the fifth, 38 in the sixth, 12 in the seventh, and 13 in the first half of the eighth century.⁶ Once again, the sixth century saw a concentration of these events, often overlapping with war and epidemics.

To this grim picture we should also add the effects of the so-called ‘Little Ice Age of the Early Middle Ages’, which lasted from c. 500–700. This phase was characterised by a

general drop in temperature and severe weather phenomena such as flooding in territories in the Mediterranean Basin. This was one of the cyclical and natural global cooling phases due to reduced solar activity, typical of interglacial periods, which are followed by ‘warm’ phases every 500 years or so (Vita Finzi 1969; Ortolani-Pagliuca 1994, 1995, 2001, 2004; McCormick *et al.* 2012). Climatologists believe that these climatic variations might have such a deep impact on the anthropic environment as to cause wars, epidemics, migrations and population decline (Ortolani 2007). The relationship between a ‘cold’ climatic phase with the events of the first two centuries of the Middle Ages and, in particular, with the large depopulation which caused the crisis of the classical urban society could thus be viewed as one of cause and effect.

Peoples and Outlooks

The noted phenomenon of intra-urban burials should not be understood as typical of a specific socio-cultural group, as it occurs in almost all the urban centres of the Mediterranean region between the second half of the sixth and the seventh centuries. In Late Antiquity (as, of course, long before) Rome was a melting-pot of different ethnic groups and the idea that this practice was imported by one these into the capital has appealed to many scholars (see discussion in Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 1994). After all, Ammianus Marcellinus (XVI, 10. 6) informs us that the emperor Constantius II, when visiting Rome in 357, ‘was surprised to see there all the races of the Earth, come together in great number ...’ It is worthwhile, therefore, considering the composition of Rome’s population between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, identifying as far as possible its ethnic or cultural components and organisation, in order to define the ‘urban anthropology’ of what was still the largest city of the Mediterranean region.

Rome boasted between 800,000 and 1,000,000 inhabitants, at least until the sack in AD 410. All of them, except for slaves, were Roman citizens thanks to the *Constitutio Antoniniana*. Foreigners moving into the city (with the exception of runaway/fugitive slaves) were considered *peregrini* (according to the definition given in fourth-century sources), as opposed to the *cives domo Roma*; however, from a juridical point of view, they were to all intents and purposes Roman citizens. During periods of crisis, those *peregrini-cives* were ejected from the City to preserve the resources of the *Annona*, as probably happened to Ammianus Marcellinus himself in 384 (Amm. Marc., XIV, 6.19; see also Symmachus, *Ep.* II, 7).

Funerary and official inscriptions can also point to Rome’s ethnic complexity. It is reasonable to assume that the country or city of origin was recorded for the *peregrini* and for the first generation of immigrants. Inscriptions record people coming from Heliopolis, Gaul, Thrace, Cappadocia, Numidia, Sicily,

Pannonia, Carthage, Spain, Arabia, and from other parts of Italy; Jewish immigrants are also mentioned.⁷

At the end of the Byzantine-Gothic War, the majority of Rome's population was made up of Italians, who slowly repopulated the city after its almost complete abandonment caused by repeated sieges. These came from cities such as Luni, Piacenza, Spoleto, Praeneste and Narni, with a few Goths and Illyrian clergymen also documented by personal name types (Gregory, *Dialogi* III, 6, 10, 14, 23; IV, 37, 55. See also ICUR I, 945).

Modern theories of urban anthropology, in particular those developed by the School of Chicago, propose that the aggregation of different ethnic groups in the 'urban body' takes place in so-called 'natural areas' – areas of aggregation and common interest. According to this principle, Rome during the imperial period and even more so in Late Antiquity would have been subdivided into districts of immigrants with the same origin, characterised by dynamics of aggregation typical of modern metropolises such as Chicago (Sobrero 2009). However, looking at some of these ancient communities, such as the Jewish one, for which scraps of information are available, we can see how they were in fact relatively spread out within the City and clustered around several synagogues (Noy 2000). According to the epigraphic evidence, Jewish communities were located in Trastevere, near Porta Capena, in the area of the *agger*, in the Suburra, on the Caelian Hill and the Campus Martius.

Except for the Jews, other immigrant communities seem not to have lived in specific areas of Imperial Rome; rather, they were more likely to be associated with people with the same occupation than with fellow countrymen. While *stationes* are often seen as foci of ethnic aggregation, they were actually organised according to cities and *municipia*. The only exceptions known are the *statio* of the *Norici* in Rome and the one of *Mauretania Caesariensis* in the piazzale delle Corporazioni at Rome's port city of Ostia. *Stationes* depended upon decisions taken by the municipal councils of their mother-towns and were used as intermediaries by the *Annona*. The agents of the *stationes* (*stationarii*) were few and strongly interconnected with the public administration. These organisations were also in charge of transmarine trades, which worked as links with the motherland for those immigrants living in Rome.

Even if evidence is lacking, many of these immigrants likely paid a monthly sum to the *collegia* for their (eventual) funeral. These funerary rites seem to have been homologated by the widespread use of *columbaria* and traditional local practices probably played a very minor role, if any. Indeed, in Rome very little evidence exists for separate or distinct funerary areas used by groups with a common geographical origin. While most of the immigrants must have been using collegial *columbaria* (subsequently substituted by catacombs), the wealthy among them had tombs along consular roads. Slaves and freedmen were usually buried

together with other members of their *familiae*. Jewish and Christian catacombs were the only burial sites linked to specific religious communities, among which we can find also a small number of foreigners.

Funerary practices can sometimes reveal the ethnic origin of the deceased. For instance, in the period when cremation was the norm in Rome (pre-third century AD), immigrants from countries where inhumation was predominant may well have been buried according to this practice. Robert Turcan (1985) has suggested that the reappearance of inhumations in Rome was indeed influenced by foreign practices. The burial recesses of the Jewish catacombs of Vigna Randanini were *kokhim* tombs, typical of the Palestinian tradition. The tomb 'of the Egyptians' in the Vatican necropolis, dating to the second century, has Egyptian deities painted on three of its internal walls. However, the exterior of the latter had no peculiar or distinctive architectural characteristics and was seemingly a unicum. Generally speaking, then, it seems that, between the first and fourth centuries AD, the Jewish *kokhim* were the only typology of tombs markedly associated with a specific ethnic group based in Rome (Vismara 1986; Noy 2000, 191, 197).

This homogeneity was most likely maintained among the new cultural groups arriving after the Byzantine-Gothic War and the evidence from the now increasingly popular urban burials seem to confirm this. However, an exception may lie in the small (10 burials) necropolis of soldiers (one of whom was found with his *spatha*) and their families found within the *Porticus Liviae*; dating to the second half of the sixth century, the inhumed had morphological features indicative of Germanic stock (see bibliography in Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 2004, 116, n.60); they may relate to the city's imperial garrison which is known to have had diverse ethnicities.

Modern anthropology of disaster argues how cemeteries play a central role in the case of catastrophic and traumatic events, since they allow the survivors to carry out funerary rites and facilitate their grieving and mourning for the lost (Ligi 2009, 82). This is a 'protection' mechanism used by the living to ritualise their pain in order to cope with it: the burial rite sanctioned the final passage of the deceased from the world of the living into the otherworld. If we examine those factors used by anthropologists to identify a catastrophic or disastrous event,⁸ we can see how they repeatedly match episodes which occurred during our study period and area. This 'catastrophic' picture corresponded to a constant, or at least frequent, mass-emergency situation – something very much testified by the apocalyptic tones of many contemporary authors (cf Flori 2008). These traumatic events, including violence caused through warfare, sieges and food shortages and the noted natural calamities, overwhelmed many populations and damaged so many economies, undermining social order and political authority, and were interpreted as signs of the imminent end of the

world. Such is stated for Rome by Gregory the Great in one passage of his *Dialogues* (III, 38, 3) and in his *Homilies of Ezekiel* (II, 6, 24). But similar considerations appeared earlier also in pagan texts, such as *In Rufinum* by Claudianus and the *Asclepius*, a fourth-century Latin translation of a third-century Greek text, where Hermes Trismegistus predicted to Asclepius that the end of Egypt was near (Gualandri 2002). The fact that Lactantius in his *Divinae Institutiones* announced the end of the world with the same apocalyptic tones seen in the *Asclepius* shows how pagan and Christian authors shared the similar ideas of the end and of the evil unleashed before it.

The fact that urban burials appeared during this recognised period of crisis might indicate that they functioned as ‘short-cuts’ or as pragmatic solutions to facilitate the grieving process in critical times, reducing the distance between the Christian community of the living and the community of the dead. In this sense, it is significant that, already in the fourth century, extramural necropoleis tended to be built closer to the cities (this phenomenon has been recognised in northern Italy: see Cantino Wataghin and Lambert 1998, 103) and mausolea and mortuary chambers similarly became more commonly associated with suburban villas (Griesbach 2007, 159).

We should not consider the spread of this funeral practice in terms of a contraposition between ‘catastrophism–continuism’, based on the idea that early medieval towns maintained an urban ‘dignity’. The appearance of intramural burial spaces was not linked to the desegregation of the urban structures; instead, it can be read as a consequence both of human disasters and of a deep change in the social texture of the inhabitants and their eschatological expectations. Rome was changing substantially in form, fabric, scale, people and mentality across this critical period of history and charting these many and complex changes remains a key task for archaeologists and historians alike.

Notes

- Note that tombs of sixth- and seventh-century date have been found inside or near churches and urban monasteries in Rome, including St. Stefano Rotondo, SS Quattro Coronati, St. Eusebio, St. Susanna, St. Maria Antiqua, St. Marco, St. Saba, St. Crisogono, St. Clemente, St. Cecilia, St. Andrea Catabarbara, St. Vito, St. Bibiana, St. Gregorio al Celio/St. Andrea al Clivo di Scauro, St. Croce in Gerusalemme; see Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 2004, 115 ff, site nos 1, 5, 11, 23, 29, 35, 45, 51, 52, 59, 60, 62, 64, 74, 78.
- ICUR II, 4794 offers a detailed description of the restoration of the cemetery associated with the basilica of St. Paul outside the walls/fuori le mura. See Fiocchi Nicolai 2000, 308, 2001, 91–92, 133–134, 2003, 944.
- We can now update the number of burials from the following sites: 21) Piazza dei 500; 37) Mausoleo di Augusto; 43) Pendicidel Palatino (Horreum Severiano, also known as the Terme di Eliogabalo); 61) Piazza Venezia (piazza Madonna di Loreto); 64 or 80) S. Bibiana or Ninfeo degli Horti Liciniani; 83) Terme di Traiano. The new funerary sites are: 86) Piazza Bocca della Verità; 87) Via Petrarca; 88) Piazza Navona; 89) Via Giulia-Largo Perosi; 90) Testaccio (Nuovo mercato di Testaccio–Via Nicola Zabaglia); 91) Piazza Venezia (central area); 92) Palazzo Valentini (piazza SS. Apostoli); 93) Via Mecenate; 94) Via Marmorata; 95) Testaccio, Via G. Branca, angolo via Florio; 96) Casino dell’Aurora (Villa Boncompagni Ludovisi), isolato tra le vie Aurora, Lombardia e Ludovisi. These new sites will soon be published in more detail.
- See Meneghini 2013, 406. The burial was discovered during rescue excavations by the Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Roma in 2011. The skeleton of an infant was found inside an amphora (likely Eastern Mediterranean), located in a second-century building, which was abandoned in the fourth century and soon after re-used as a dump; no funerary assemblage was found. The tomb overlay a fourth-century layer and was covered by one of the same century. In 2007, other tombs were found in the same area during ACEA excavations (Mirella Serlorenzi and Carla Pischedda, pers. comms).
- The urban centres taken into examination include: *Aeclanum*, *Aequum Tuticum*, *Alba Fucens*, *Allifae*, *Amiternum*, *Ancona*, *Anxanum*, *Arretium*, *Ariminum*, *Benevento*, *Calatia*, *Castrum Novum*, *Compsa*, *Corfinium*, *Cosa*, *Cuma*, *Falerio Picens*, *Ferentium*, *Fesulae*, *Florentia*, *Forum Sempronii*, *Histonium*, *Hortona*, *Interamnia/Castrum Aprutiense*, *Luceria*, *Matelica*, *Miseno*, *Neapolis*, *Paestum*, *Pinna Vestinorum*, *Portus*, *Puteoli*, *Rusellae*, *Sentinum*, *Suasa*, *Suessula*, *Teate*, *Telesia*, *Terracina*, *Teanum Sidicinum*, *Truentum/Castrum Truentinum*, *Tuder*, *Urbs Salvia*, *Urvinum Hortense*, *Volsinii*, *Volterra*.
- Some of these earthquakes might have caused tsunamis, which have been recorded by Soloviev *et al.* 2000. Fifteen of these events took place between the fourth and mid-eighth centuries, with a peak during the Byzantine-Gothic War. Five tsunamis are recorded during the fourth century (342: Cyprus; 348: Syrian coasts – Beirut; 363: Dead Sea; 363: Calabria – Sicily; 365: eastern Mediterranean Sea), three during the fifth century (407: Tyrrhenian Sea – Ischia; 426: Aegean Sea; 447: Sea of Marmara–Bosporus–Dardanelles); five during the sixth century (542: Sea of Marmara; 551: Aegean Sea – Euboea; 551: Botrys–Beirut–Tripoli; 554: Aegean Sea – Kos; 558: Sea of Marmara – Bosporus), none during the seventh century, and two during the first half of the eighth century (740: Sea of Marmara; 746: Syria – Lebanon – Egypt).
- ICUR I, 330, 1021, 1441, 1619, 1748, 2212, 2214–15, 3327, 4327; II, 4179, 4499, 4554; V, 13397; VIII, 20819. See also CIL VI, 4, 2, 41329e, 5061.
- Barton 1969, 37–39 and Ligi 2009, 30–31. ‘Barton definisce “disastro” una situazione di “stress collettivo” ... che si verifica quando la maggior parte dei membri di una comunità ritiene di non trovarsi più in quelle condizioni di vita che sia spetta vengano garantite dal normale funzionamento del sistema sociale. Queste “condizioni di vita”... includono: la sicurezza dell’ambiente fisico, la protezione da attacchi armati, l’approvvigionamento di cibo, la possibilità di disporre liberamente delle proprie abitazioni e di adeguate risorse economiche, e – sul piano simbolico generale – la permanenza

di una costellazione stabile di significati, indispensabili per comprendere le informazioni e coordinare le pratiche sociali quotidiane’.

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The Transformation of Society in Late Antique Hispania (AD 300–700)

Javier Arce

In his *De Bello Gothico* (V, 12, 50), the Byzantine historian Procopius recounts that Theudis, *comes armiger* of the Ostrogothic King Theodoric, was sent by the Italian monarch to govern *Hispania* (in c. AD 520?). Theudis, of Ostrogothic origin, ‘took as his wife a woman from Spain: she was not, however, of the race of the Visigoths, but belonged to the house of one of the wealthy inhabitants of that land, and not only possessed great wealth but also a great estate [*chores polles*]. From this estate, he gathered about 2000 soldiers and surrounded himself with a force of bodyguards ...’¹ Thanks to another comment in Procopius (*De Bello Vandalico*, 1, 24), we also know that Theudis’ estate was located in a region far from the sea, in the interior of the Iberian Peninsula.

Fifty years later, the *Vitas Patrum emeritensium* (IV, 2–3) (dating to the seventh century) mention that ‘the wife of a very noble man, notable of the city of *Emerita* (Mérida), of senatorial rank, descendant of an illustrious stock and of noble origin’, was saved by Paul, surgeon and bishop of the city. The couple, as a sign of gratitude, left half of their possessions to the bishop and Church of *Emerita*, with the rest to be donated after their death. The author of the *Vitas* (IV, 2–3) also says that ‘their wealth was so great that it would be impossible to find a richer senator in all of the province of Lusitania’.

Later on still, in 713, the modern province of Murcia in southern Spain was ruled by a certain Theodemir. The Arabic sources attest that he signed an agreement with the son of Musa, the emir Abd al Aziz. Theodemir is shown as a large landowner and in his vast estates great quantities of wheat, flour, vinegar, honey and oil were produced, as testified by the treaty that also mentions slaves and tenants (Arce 2011, 289–290). The *villa* at Pla de Nadal has been plausibly identified with Theodemir’s luxurious residence (Ribera 2015).

These three examples, each from different time periods (earlier sixth, mid-sixth and early eighth centuries), combine to indicate that the condition of the large *possessores* of the Iberian Peninsula arguably did not change much during these centuries. The situation even sounds very similar to the elite landscape of the fourth century (manifested in the system of land ownership and large *possessores*), as the archaeological evidence from *villae* such as Noheda, Saldaña, (Pedrosa), Carranque, S. Cucufate in Lusitania, and elsewhere, seems to confirm (cf Chavarria Arnau 2007; for the opulent *villa* of Noheda, see Valero Tevar 2013). Literary sources confirm this scenario, as testified by the episode of the relatives of the emperor Theodosius, who were able to muster an army from their tenants and slaves to fight against the usurper Constantine III (407–411). The *possessores*, *nobiles*, *locupletes*, *potentes* remained part of the territory’s high society during the centuries following the arrival of the Goths in *Hispania* (Arce 2012).

At the opposite end of the social ladder, we still hear of large numbers of slaves and servants engaged in agriculture – ‘*opus servile, id est, agrum, pratum, vineam*’, as described by the contemporary author, Martin of Braga (see below). The Church did not facilitate the abolition of slavery. Slaves, unlike free men, were subject to torture, the same difference between *honestiores* and *humiliores* attested after Marcus Aurelius in the later second century. They were completely dependent on their masters. Many tried to escape from their condition to find better owners or to start a new life, and fugitive slaves are often mentioned in Visigothic legislation and in the Church Councils (King 1972, 159f).

Despite these similarities, the system of power had fundamentally changed since late Roman times. The region was no longer administered from afar, from Rome or any other capital or imperial residence in Europe or in the Balkans or even from distant Constantinople. Central

authority now resided with the Visigothic king who lived in Toledo, surrounded by his court of *seniores gothorum*, the *fideles*, who took an oath of allegiance to the king and shared power with him. The majority of these, together with the king, were of Gothic lineage. Only a Goth could become king, as established by Canon 17 of the Fourth Council of Toledo (AD 638), which stipulated that no one could be a king '*nisi genere gothus et moribus dignus provehatur ad apicem regni*'. Yet his court, the *Aula Regia* or *Palatium*, was an imitation of the Roman imperial palace of the fourth and fifth centuries, as well as of its bureaucracy and of the apparatus' paraphernalia surrounding the emperor from the time of Diocletian onwards (Arce 2011, 76–78).

On the other hand, from the middle of the sixth century the Gothic court – a minority ruling over the majority of the Hispano-Roman population and their descendants (duly named as *romani* and *hispani* in contemporary terminology) – introduced a new element, which would radically change society: the king became allied and deeply linked to the Church and its bishops. The king was now the delegate of God on Earth, *gratia Dei*, by the grace of God. The titling of the Councils underlined this role: *Felicissimus Deo* (589, III Council of Toledo); *ortodoxus Ervigius* (633, IV Council of Toledo); *amator Christi* (636, V Council of Toledo); *amator verae fidei* (Ervigius, XIV Council of Toledo, 684); and so on. The king ruled through the Councils, with the approval and support of the bishops. Then bishops and kings ruled together, as specified in the Eighth Council of Toledo (652). The king was not only responsible for human affairs ('*in rebus humanis*'), but for the divine ones too ('*sed etiam in causis divinis*'). The king was forced to submit his decisions to the Council. The Church was instrumental in electing the new king, with both bishops and nobles participating in this process, and with the king formally consecrated by the bishop. This actual consecration process started with the reign of Sisenand in 636 (although the date is disputed) and then came to be imitated by the Frankish kingdoms and others. The king was therefore *electus a Deo*, and in this sense we can understand P. D. King's description of Visigothic rulership as 'a theocratic monarchy' (1972, 23).

The powerful alliance between king, Church, bishops and Councils would lead the changes and transformations in the society of the Iberian Peninsula from the mid-sixth century until 711. But this was a slow and deep-rooted process, involving all classes and one transforming habits, lifestyles, mentalities and behaviours, as well as the urban landscape.

Indeed, in the towns, statues began to disappear from public squares, porticos, fora, buildings and fountains. One of the arguments the inhabitants of Orcystus (Asia Minor) had used to support their request to the emperor Constantine (335–336) to obtain the status of *civitas* was that in their city they had a *forum istatuis veterum principum ornatum* (ILS, 6091). During the fourth century, statues, omnipresent in cities like Ephesus, Aphrodisias and Rome, and more locally,

Tarraco and Emerita, were still perceived as essential elements of display in the cityscape. In *Hispania*, statues were still being erected in the second half and at the end of the fourth century, and include that set up at Barcino for Nummius Aemilianus Dexter, dedicated by the *provinciales* of the province of Asia, which he had administered as governor and proconsul under Theodosius I in the 380s (CIL, II, 4512). Another example, dating to the reign of the emperor Gratian (370–380), comes from Emerita, where the base of a statue of Octavius Clarus, *vir clarissimus, vicarius hispaniarum*, was found reused in a necropolis (Arce 2006, 259–265. On late Roman statuary and cities, see in general Smith and Ward-Perkins 2016, with Hispania summarised by Witschel, 72–75).

But from the fifth century onwards, there are (as yet) no known new statues from the cities of *Hispania*. No portraits or statues survive depicting the Visigothic kings and notables. The Goths, so keen to imitate the Romans, clearly did not continue the tradition of public iconographic representations. Portraiture effectively disappeared in the Visigothic age. The reason behind this must be one of ideological and religious origin, linked to the Christian idea that only Christ is worthy to be depicted. This implies that the visual landscape of the city similarly was deeply altered.

Urban society itself significantly changed during the sixth and seventh centuries, especially with regard to civic traditions such as entertainments and public events. In the mid-fifth century, the circuses in the cities of *Hispania* (about ten are known) went out of use and many were soon robbed for materials (For loss of such buildings and for a wider analysis of urban transformations, see Diarte-Blasco 2012). The last-known show performed in a circus of *Hispania* dates to 504, as recorded in the *Consularia Caesaraugustana*: '*Caesaraugustae circus spectatus est*'. However, the text does not mention the kinds of shows that took place there then and no archaeological evidence of a circus at *Caesaraugusta* (Zaragoza) has so far been identified.

The presence of an *auriga* is attested by an epitaph dating to the mid-fifth century, in which the deceased is, noticeably, presented as Christian (Arce 2003). Furthermore, the tombstone came from the Christian basilica of Casa Herrera, near Emerita. These strong Christian connotations are problematic since contemporary civil and ecclesiastical legislations tend to present the activity of this sort of individual as incompatible with the Christian religion. To make sense of this contradiction, I attributed to the word *auriga* a symbolic meaning (i.e. *auriga Christi*); however, my interpretation has been challenged (Teja 1994), perhaps rightly so. In any case, what it is significant here is that in *Hispania* the shows once performed in circuses, theatres and amphitheatres progressively disappeared during the fifth – and in some towns already in the fourth – century, with the archaeological evidence confirming the written sources.

During the sixth and seventh centuries, Visigothic Hispania will have had little space or need for shows and entertainments. The reason for this lies in the rigid influence of the Church. As highlighted by Hillgarth, across this period the Church was ‘the enemy of their few pleasures’ (1980, 3–60; cf Arce 2011, 181–185). The Roman pagan calendar had been full of public festivities, processions, banquets and shows (see Scullard 1981; see also Meneghini, this volume). None of these can be seen to continue in the sixth or seventh centuries, although exactly when and how quickly these losses came is not known.

Nonetheless, some popular festivities are documented: in particular, during the celebrations of saints’ days according to the calendar of saints, the Councils inform us that locals used to dance and sing. But such enjoyment was frowned upon: thus, the Third Council of Toledo (589) was relentless, reckoning that ‘the habit, unconformable to religion, which people have during saints’ days, should be completely eradicated; namely that the worshippers that are to attend the divine service, indulge themselves with dances and indecent songs (*saltationibus et turpibus ... canticis*). This tradition must be prohibited everywhere in the realm’ (Toledo III, *can.* 23).

One might go so far as to claim that Sundays were dull or restrictive days. In his work *De correctione rusticorum* (ch. 18), Martin of Braga addresses and admonishes his people to not do any of their regular chores and tasks on that day: ‘*opus servile, id est, agrum, pratum, vineam ... non faciatis in die dominico*’. In 589, the Council of Narbona even prohibited yoking oxen on Sunday. On Sundays women were not allowed to spin and judges were not allowed to convene tribunals. Following the precept that ‘one always has to eat on Sundays and never to fast’, Martin of Braga allows that during these days one can cook ‘*quod ad necessitate reficiendi corpusculo pro exquoquendo pertinet cibo*’ (*de correctione rust.*, 18). Similarly, during the pagan festivities of the *Saturnalia*, while the main aim was to have fun and enjoy oneself all day long, only cooks and pastry chefs were allowed to work (Lucian, *Saturnalia*, 13). In Visigothic Hispania, the tradition of organising shows to celebrate the New Year was still alive, despite being prohibited by the Church Councils. The latter also condemned the practice of decorating houses with laurel and covering them with branches during festivities (Braga II, 572). The Church’s doctrine about festivities was clear: they were for leisure (*otium*) and for religion (*‘festi tantummodo otii et religionis sunt’* – Isidore, *Natura rerum*, I, 4).

This period witnessed, of course, the appearance of a notable and, quickly, numerous new social group, beside the poor and the wealthy, the freemen and the slaves, the *potentes* and the members of the court: this group comprised clerics, clergymen, deacons, presbyters, readers and bishops. The townsfolk were now growing used to being ruled or tended by bishops, who had replaced secular *potentes* and

rich *curiales*. We have several examples to cite: bishop Zeno, who organised the reconstruction of the walls of *Emerita* at the end of the fifth century; bishop Hydatius, who led the diplomatic negotiations between Suevi, Goths and Romans, in the second half of the fifth century; the bishops of *Emerita*, in particular Masona, who challenged the Visigothic King Leovigild and *de facto* ruled the city; plus Leander of Seville, a royal advisor, or Isidore, instigator of Councils, Braulio of *Caesaraugusta*, Leo, bishop of *Turiasso*, who organised the defence of the city and the war against the *bagaudae* (449), and many others besides.

Townsfolk also grew accustomed to the fact that bishops were now their patrons and that they took care of the poor. The number of needy likely did not grow in comparison to the Roman period, but they do become noticeably more visible in written sources. Most of the latter are ecclesiastical texts, now concerned with these people in accordance to the Christian precepts of charity, mercy and love. This interest is reflected in the townscapes, where were established buildings purposely dedicated to help, host and feed the needy. For example, in c. 580 bishop Masona of *Emerita* built a *xenodochium* for the poor, where honey, oil and bread were distributed (This *xenodochium* has been tentatively identified archaeologically by Mateos 1995, 309–316, but I would dispute this identification).

Other bishops urged the urban rich to donate their wealth to the Church for its many projects (VPE, V, 3, 4). Benefactors invested their money in the construction of churches, no longer as acts of evergetism, but to obtain salvation and the remission of sins. The kings led this initiative (Arce 2007, 255–260). And it is striking that, besides the less durable charitable sites, churches and monasteries were the only new buildings that are erected across this period; in contemporary written and epigraphic sources, we find reference to no other building activity, except for the strengthening of town defences. This ecclesiastical emphasis would greatly modify the townscapes of post-classical and Visigothic Hispania, although its scale and disposition remain to be fully traced archaeologically.

In the time of Ausonius in the late fourth century, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, Virgil, Terence, Sallust, Xenophon, etc. were still being taught in schools (as testified by the *Hermeneumata Pseudo-Dositheana*) (Dionisotti 1982, 83–105; cf Auebarch 1969), whereas by Isidore’s day in the seventh century, the reading of pagan authors was blamed for triggering passions and was considered an obstacle to enjoy the humble language of the Scriptures, as specified by Isidore himself (*Sent.* III, 13, 1–13). The Church now controlled education and its function was limited to transmitting what was needed for the liturgy. It is noticeable that inscribed on the ‘slates’ dating to the Visigothic period (see also Ariño, this volume), we find psalms and fragments of psalms learnt by heart for writing exercises. Yet, according to the Church, culture is not

essential for spiritual salvation; the lack of culture does not prevent entry to Heaven (Arce 2011, 204–206; Harris 1991). Slowly but surely, the Church ended up controlling all forms of teaching and culture, to the point that culture and science ceased to exist outside its influence. Auerbach (1969) says that ‘at this time, the teaching process was far from the liberal and aristocratic spirit of the educated Roman society ... Few schools did exist and education was mostly summary ... On the other hand, the priests needed to be able to explain the Christian written doctrine in a comprehensive way’. This change in the education system is testified by the fact that the *Apocalypse* was the recommended book to be read regularly in churches (Tol. IV, 17, dating to 633).

Deep changes to the elites’ modes of habitation are another aspect of this social transformation and one that is clearly attested archaeologically. The frequent dilapidation of urban *domus* and rural *villae* from the mid-fifth century is well known (see, in general, Chavarría Arnau 2007; see also papers by Vigil-Escalera and Ariño in this volume). In a short period of time, *villae* started to be reused, often soon after their abandonment; but they were now deeply different: a set of baths might become a glass workshop; an elegant peristyle would be transformed into a storeroom for *dolia*; other rooms might see reuse to manufacture ceramics. The new occupants, living in nearby huts, made quite different use of these buildings: *otium* formed no part of their lifestyle, nor did the aristocratic banquet or the bathing suites, previously shared with friends and *clientes*. The rooms of the *villa* were now reused for more practical purposes, mainly of a productive nature. The *villa* was no longer the residence of a *dominus*; the idea of the Roman *domus* had fallen apart.

These new dwellers were, I would argue, not Suevi, Vandals nor Alans, and the archaeological evidence suggests that they were not Goths either. Rather, the material culture would suggest that the residents were a mixed group; and it could be argued that they related to the rural population that had previously worked in the same *fundus* or *possessio*. They were not rich and they had to find a way to live; the old villa spaces were a magnet of sorts, the decayed spaces a quarry for recycling too. These new groups nonetheless appear organised: they manufactured, produced and presumably traded some of the commodities made in their workshops.

All of these observations lead to an obvious pair of questions: where did the previous owners move to? Did they no longer own these decayed sites? As recently stressed by Chavarría Arnau (2013), *villae* were not the permanent residences of their owners; rather, these structures had been only occasionally used, with the administration of the estate otherwise in the hands of *villici* and *conductores*. The idea that the owners of these villas abandoned them en masse and moved into towns is therefore misleading. John Percival (1976) indeed suggested that, while the owners may well have quitted their *villae*, various of their buildings were

perhaps kept in operation and continued to be economically productive. The owners might well have permitted this more functional reuse of villa ruins. However, we have an apparent contradiction here because, as we have seen, the late Roman (or Hispano-Roman) landed aristocracy seemingly persisted for a long time, at least in some areas of *Hispania*. If we exclude the *villa* at Pla de Nadal, where then are the *villae* of the senator from *Emerita* or of Theudis’ wife? What architectural characteristics did these claimed elite *villae* or residences have? Did these patricians adapt themselves to a new lifestyle, living in dilapidated buildings? Are we missing something important in the archaeology? (cf Lewit 2003, 260–274). Should we be looking for fortified residences away from the old classical villa sites?

We have therefore to accept that the inhabitants of the Peninsula (Hispano-Romans, *romani*, as well as Goths who started emigrating to *Hispania* from 531, as specified by Procopius) became used to a lower standard of living, reusing *villae* in more functional ways, and with a lack of ceremonial spaces and rooms for leisure – notably baths. Did the Church, the constant advocate of a simpler and a more sober lifestyle, play a role in this process, as Lewit (2003) has suggested? The rest of the population, meanwhile, carried on their lives as usual, in their *casae*, *tuguria* or *villulae*.

There are many other aspects touched by these changes. However, we can already conclude that, from c. AD 300 till c. 700, it is not possible to identify *drastic* changes in the economic and social structure of *Hispania*, with the late Roman structures remaining mostly unaltered. Changes did occur in the upper echelons of society, with the king more and more linked to the Church, to the bishops and to the Council. It was the Church that slowly but radically changed traditions, lifestyles, as well as the townscapes. The Goths alone cannot be blamed for transforming the society of *Hispania* in Late Antiquity.

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Abbreviations

ILS: *Inscriptiones Latinae selectae*
VPE: *Vitas patrum emeritensium*

Note

- 1 As translated by H. B. Dewing. Loeb Classical Library 107, Cambridge, 1916.

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Per omnium villas vicosque cunctos: Rural Landscapes in Late Antique Southern Italy

Roberto Goffredo and Giuliano Volpe

Southern Italy: An Example of ‘Late Antique Agrarian System’ (G.V.)

Although our understanding of the post-classical urban and rural landscapes of Southern Italy has significantly increased in the last decades, some issues remain. Some regions have been studied in great detail, sometimes through long-term projects, while in others only specific and partial investigations have been carried out (e.g. within central Apulia, Salento and Campania). The Ionic Basilicata region constitutes an interesting case, since, if we exclude *Metapontum*, we might observe a sort of stasis in the research on urban and rural settlements for the long period between the Romanisation of Magna Graecia and the Middle Ages. Moreover, few scholars have produced general (Brogiolo and Chavarría Arnau 2005) or regional overviews (e.g. *La Calabre* 1991; Volpe 1996; Grelle and Volpe 1996; Sangineto 2001; Savino 2005; Iasello 2009; De Mitri 2010).

Since the late 1970s, increasing scholarly interest in Late Antiquity has led to a series of excavations (including rescue ones), landscape surveys and small-scale projects, and stimulated a re-evaluation of previous ideas as well as a debate concerning the similarities and differences between archaeological contexts. Knowledge of ceramic forms and sequences has also grown strongly. Overall, however, it has been difficult to recognise common regional traits and the idea of a single, homogeneous ancient South of Italy is misleading, as we should immediately realise when we look at its modern counterpart.

The thirty-eighth *Convegno di Studi sulla Storia e l'Archeologia della Magna Grecia*, held in Taranto in 1998, was the first time that full focus was turned to the study of Southern Italy in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. This can be viewed as a real turning point, especially given the long-held, almost exclusive earlier scholarly focus

here on native settlements, and the Greek and early Roman periods (*Atti Taranto* 1999).

Another significant issue related to our period and area of study is related to the so-called ‘questione meridionale’ (the ‘Southern question’). On the basis of a perceived ‘underdevelopment’ of this diverse territory, scholars previously sought to link this problem to the ancient past, in particular to the post-Hannibalic period, identified as crucial in this process, as by Toynbee (1965). According to Lo Cascio (2001, 5), Toynbee’s analysis was characterised by a vision ‘radicalmente discontinuista e radicalmente continuista ad un tempo’ (‘radically discontinuous and radically continuous at the same time’).

Our own contribution will not directly address the urban context, which has been recently reassessed in depth by G. P. Brogiolo (2011). In fact, it is noticeable that Brogiolo, in collaboration with Sauro Gelichi (1998), had earlier investigated late antique urbanism, yet only briefly touched upon Southern Italy, at that time still largely understudied. At a conference on towns in the Early Middle Ages, held in Ravello in 1994, Ghislaine Noyé (1996) discussed some general urban trends in the provinces of *Apulia et Calabria, Lucania et Brutii*. At the Taranto conference, Paul Arthur (1999) analysed the phenomena of ‘ruralisation’, ‘villaggizzazione’ and Christianisation, adapting John Bintliff’s model to towns in Southern Italy (Bintliff 1997, 83); his suggestive distinction between ‘successful’ and ‘unsuccessful’ cities, in relation to their continuity or abandonment (the latter sometimes coming many centuries later), is not easily applicable to Late Antiquity. Leaving aside the problematic teleological implications of this model, we would argue that it is difficult to determine the success or failure of towns, both in terms of their materiality and institutional organisation. In addressing urban as well as

rural contexts, we therefore prefer the concept of ‘resilience’, which perhaps provides a more effective frame to explain changes and new typologies of settlements (Citter 2015).

Overall, we can recognise that the amount of literature available on the late antique and early medieval South is now much greater than few years ago. After the early, almost isolated investigation of the villa of S. Giovanni di Ruoti by Alistair Small’s team (1977–1984), often sizeable – but all informative – excavations in urban and rural contexts took place in Naples, Otranto, Vaste, Centoposte, Lecce, Metaponto, *Grumentum*, Venosa, Egnazia, the villas of Masseria Ciccotti and San Gilio, San Giacomo degli Schiavoni, the major early medieval abbey of San Vincenzo al Volturno, Sibari, San Giusto, *Herdonia*, Canosa, *Salapia*, Vagnari and the villa of Faragola. Meanwhile, systematic surveys have provided better detail about the late antique rural landscape; these include projects at Monte Massico, in the basin of the Garigliano River, at *Buxentum*, *Brundisium*, *Venusia*, Oria, in Salento, in the river valleys of the Biferno, Bradano, Basentello, Celone, Ofanto, Carapelle and Cervaro.

Very recently, several conferences have dealt with towns and countryside in Late Antiquity: perhaps most prominent are the two important STAIM seminars on Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages in Southern Italy, on rural (STAIM 1) and urban (STAIM 2) sites respectively; plus the first Piazza Armerina CISEM conference on rural residences (Pensabene and Sfameni 2014); and the ‘Giornate Gregoriane’ held in 2014 in Agrigento, dedicated to late antique towns across the old Roman Empire, but with valuable contributions on Southern Italy (Parello and Rizzo eds 2016).

Furthermore, a number of large-scale surveys and excavations with multidisciplinary approaches have been launched in the last decade, such as those carried out at Faragola and in Salento. Within these, bioarchaeology has played a significant role, leading to a successful assessment of archaeological and palaeo-climatological data; such studies, based in particular on isotopic analyses, have helped to highlight connections between different phases, to explore socio-economic crises at certain settlements and to track some climatic changes (e.g. Caracuta and Fiorentino 2009; Grasso and Fiorentino 2009; Arthur *et al.* 2009; Fiorentino *et al.* 2010; Caracuta *et al.* 2012). Furthermore, more advanced archaeozoological analyses on substantial samples of animal bones are informing us about previously unexplored or undervalued practices such as transhumance in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages (Buglione and De Venuto 2008; Buglione 2009; Buglione *et al.* 2015, 2016).

Given this vast amount of new material available, only cursorily mentioned above, it would be impossible here to engage with all the data and to consider in any detail the multifaceted complexity of the connections that they imply. Instead this contribution will focus only on some key aspects of the south Italian countryside in Late Antiquity, including

current readings and interpretations of change at both villas and small settlements, and will define some future research trends and approaches.

Many Villas, What Functions? (R.G.)

Recent debates have seen a questioning of the dynamics linked to the development, reinforcement and expansion of the economic interests of the Senatorial aristocracy, the imperial *res privata*, and the Church in the countryside of Southern Italy (e.g. *Atti Taranto* 1999; Vera 1995, 1999, 2005; Volpe 1996, 2007, 2008, 2014; Carra Bonacasa and Vitale 2007). The constitution of large private estates, both as isolated *fundi* or as *massae fundorum*, under imperial or ecclesiastical control, has been interpreted as one of the clearer expressions of the centripetal power of this ‘inner’ compartment of the Empire. In different time and different ways, Southern Italy demonstrated a communal ability to react against structural changes in the imperial institutions and economy, which started in the later third century AD (see Vera 2005 and 2010).

Between the fourth century and the first half of the sixth, the provinces of *Apulia et Calabria*, *Lucania et Bruttii* and, to a lesser extent, *Campania* experienced a general prosperity, as testified by a range of aspects, notably institutional stability, economic growth, rural continuity, enhanced local production, improvements to the road system and other infrastructures, and closer links with the market in Rome. If we briefly note some of the recent relevant literature (e.g. Lewit 2004; Chavarría Arnau *et al.* 2006; Brogiolo and Chavarría Arnau 2007; Sfameni 2007; Ochoa *et al.* 2008; Volpe 2011a; Pensabene and Sfameni 2014), we can observe how the study of villas (these seen by many as a ‘visual paradigm’ of the late antique countryside – see Marazzi 2010, 682; Wickham 2005, 442f) has mainly been focused on their architectural and typological features, as well as their diachronic evolution. In *Apulia*, villas with luxurious residential spaces, equipped with baths, gardens and porticos with a view, rooms dedicated to the *otium* and the epiphany of the *dominus*, and surrounded by fields of wheat and other crops, stood out in the landscape of the plains of the Tavoliere and the hills of the sub-Apennines of the Daunia region. Their locations testified to their role as *foci* of power and of estate administration for the local, regional or provincial élites, whose presence is otherwise difficult to identify in the urban network (Goffredo and Volpe 2015a) (Fig. 4.1).

The villa of Faragola, located along the *via Aurelia Aeclanensis* between *Auscium* (Ascoli Satriano) and *Herdonia* (Ordona), is a good example of one of these sizeable elite rural residences (Volpe 2006a; *Faragola 1* 2009; Volpe and Turchiano 2012): the first phase complex, dating to the fourth century, was articulated around a quadrangular, monumental peristyle of c. 1200 m² and a

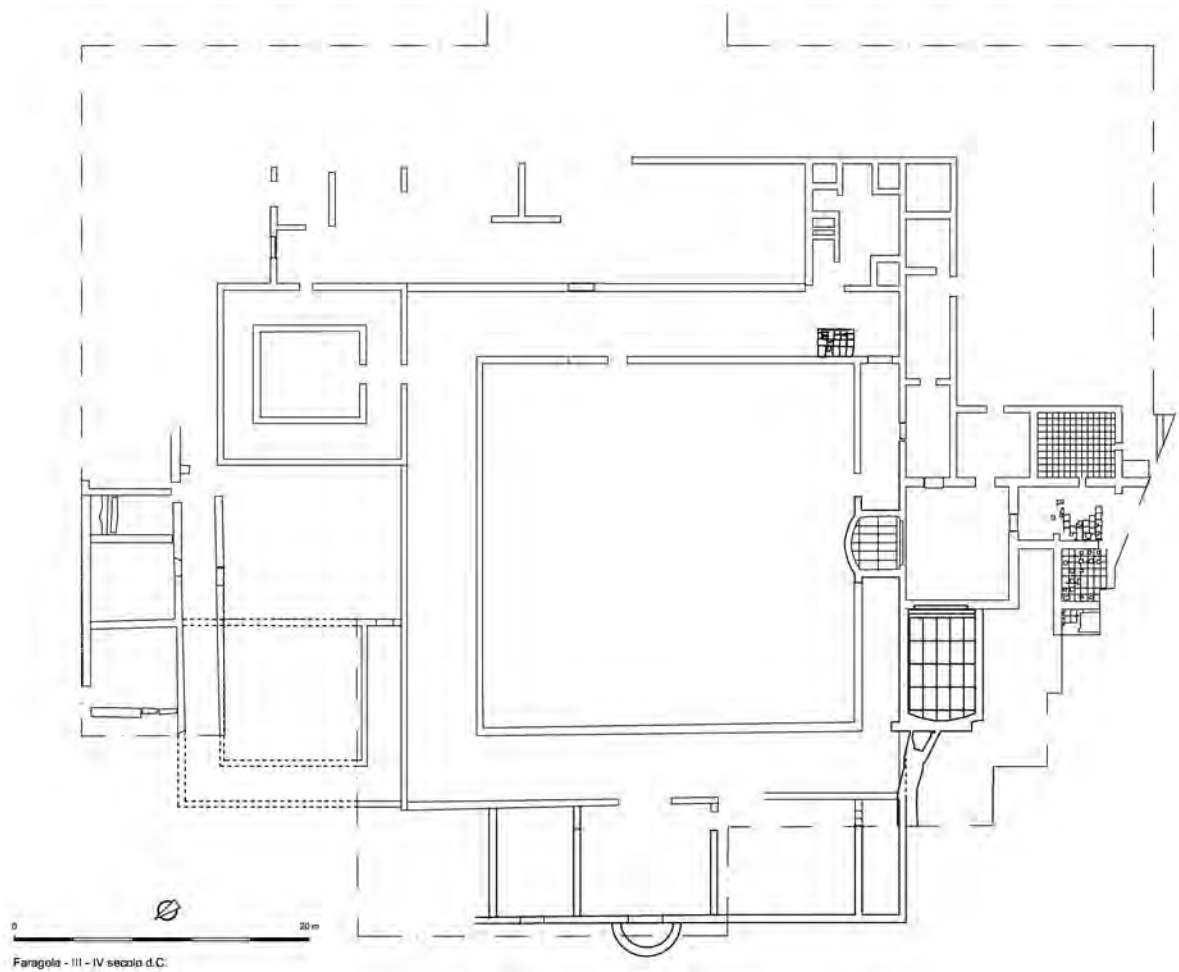


Figure 4.1 Villa of Faragola, fourth-century AD phase

bath-suite, which was enlarged in the fifth century when the building was largely refurbished (see below). Less opulent were the villas of Masseria Ciccotti (Gualtieri 2008) and San Gilio in the high valley of the Bradano River (Di Giuseppe 2008), which underwent profound transformations between the third and fourth centuries. In the province of Potenza, San Giovanni di Ruoti (Small 2008), simply decorated but with a set of private baths, was rebuilt over a previous (first–third-century AD) residence during the second half of the fourth century.

In *Lucania*, the villas of Malvaccaro and Maiorano di Viggiano, both ‘peripheral’ but close to the renovated *via Herculia*, featured large *trichlinia* whose spectacular architecture clearly embodied elite values, ideologies and lifestyles. Only a small part of the *pars urbana* of the villa at Maiorano has been excavated, but this revealed an apsed *trichlinium* of the fourth century, with a mosaic floor and alabaster-lined walls (Russo 2005). Less is known of the terraced villa of Malvaccaro, with first- and second-century phases, but a large apsidal *cenatio*, accessed through a vestibule with a floor decorated with *opus sectile* and

surrounded by storerooms and kitchens, was probably built in the mid-fourth to early fifth centuries (Di Noia 2008, 69–70).

Among those factors that determined the decision to re-establish/renew previous complexes or to build new ones, the proximity to roads, towns, local urban and rural market places, as well as to sources of different sorts of supplies, all appear to have been of particular relevance. In addition, the Apulian, Calabrian and Campanian coastal areas were much praised for their natural beauty, a trend already documented from the Augustan period, when they first became favoured destinations for *otium* and high social activities. Relevant Roman and later Roman sites in this context include the villa of Porto Saturo on the Ionian coast of Taranto (D’Auria and Iacovazzo 2006) and the large complexes at Casignana Palazzi (Malacrino 2014, 294–296) and Gioiosa Ionica (Sfameni 2007, 53) along the Calabrian Ionian coast. For the late fourth century, Symmachus’ letters inform us about the Phlegraean estates of the Nicomachi family and of the villa of Nicomachus Flavianus near *Mons Gaurus* (perhaps Mount Barbaro), where the famous *vinum Gauranum* was

produced (Savino 2005, 37f, with an analysis of the written sources). Symmachus himself owned three or even four villas in the area between the suburbia of Rome and Naples, one of which was sited at Bacoli (*Ep.* 1, 8, 1; *Ep.* 1, 1, 2; *Ep.* 1, 1, 5; *Ep.* 8, 23, 3). He also owned a *deversorium* at Lucrino (*Ep.* 1, 1; 1, 8; *Ep.* 8, 23), one *praetorium* at Baia (*Ep.* 1, 3, 3; *Ep.* 2, 26, 1; *Ep.* 5, 93; *Ep.* 7, 24) and another at *Puteoli* (*Ep.* 2, 26, 1; *Ep.* 6, 66). Symmachus' letters testify that, between AD 375 and 401, he visited these rural centres for extended periods of time, not only to relax but also to check on their agricultural productivity.

Similar phenomena of monumentalisation and upgrading are not common to all the villas that continued to be occupied into Late Antiquity. We still know too little about the villas of Agnoli and Santa Maria di Merino on the Adriatic coasts of northern *Apulia*, and it is difficult to determine their fourth-century forms (Volpe 1996, 211–219); however, the industrial parts of these complexes, geared to oil and wine production, were being enlarged at this time, possibly indicating that the residential functions of these sites were being reduced.

A similar focus on productivity is evident in many Campanian late Roman/antique villas, since the vast majority of them are identified as 'small', 'compact' and 'rustic' (see Pagano 2009). Some Calabrian villas are noteworthy in this sense: for instance, at the site of Fischia, Scalea, a press connected to a *lacus vinarius* was installed in the once richly decorated *pars urbana* of early imperial date, perhaps as early as the end of the third century (Sangineto 2001, 222).

These few examples already reveal variations as well as some consistent patterns; evidently our understanding of the character and contents of late Roman and late antique villas is constantly evolving, as new excavations occur. At the same time, it is clear that we should be trying to identify more clearly the function(s) of the known villas from Southern Italy, an urgent task in consideration of the growing number of new and heterogeneous sites.

In *Apulia*, the theory of the 'contraction of villas', as well as the emergence of few 'central' complexes (places where wealth was collected, managed and displayed), is now challenged through analysis of data emerging from nearly all of those territorial contexts which have seen systematic field survey (Volpe 2005). In the Carapelle valley (Fig. 4.2), between the Tavoliere and the sub-Apennines of the Daunia region, surveys have demonstrated how the complex of Faragola was part of a network of 21 other villas, founded already in the early imperial period and located 1.5–2 km from each other. These seem to have remained in operation during the fourth and fifth centuries and were probably refurbished and enlarged in that period (Goffredo and Ficco 2009). Similar groups of villas have been discovered on the hills around the city of *Vibinum*–Bovino (Romano and Volpe 2015) and in the Ofanto valley, central Puglia (Goffredo 2011).

How should we interpret the continuity of life at all these sites? And how should we link it to the well-attested late antique tendency to manage large estates more rationally? Key to this will be a better understanding of the functions and specialisations of the different typologies of villas (Turchiano 2014). In particular, we need to identify the specific functions of the clusters of villas mentioned above, in order to trace possible hierarchical relations between these and the broader system of land management of which they were part. Finally, among the more commonplace *massae fundorum*, we should not underestimate the persistent presence of medium- and small-size estates, as a legacy of a more traditional modes of land management, where a strong link between villa and *fundus* was maintained.

Farmsteads, Rural Houses and Villages (*vici*): The Problematic Evidence of the '*rustici*' (R.G.)

It is essential now to look beyond the villa landscape and to engage with other forms of rural settlements, both permanent and seasonal, where the countryfolk, the free tenants, the *servi quasi coloni*, the smaller landowners and the day-labourers lived and worked (Lo Cascio 1997; Rosafio 2002; Bowden *et al.* 2004; Wickham 2005, 273–280; Vera 2010). This has been the main aim of the *Roman Peasant Project* (Ghisleni *et al.* 2011): based firmly on archaeological and bioarchaeological evidence more than on the often biased literary and Christian sources, the project has already produced many valuable data and triggered very useful discussions about the lifestyles and economies of peasants. After all, surveys reveal the widespread presence of houses ('case') and farmsteads ('fattorie') – these terms (whose labels and criteria can vary between surveys) generally used to define buildings with a residential or productive function, seemingly occupied and worked by non-elite groups – but, as stressed on several occasions by Vera (2005 and 2010), few of these sites have so far seen excavation. Accordingly, we should be careful in considering under the same broad 'working site' category the diversity of architectural and functional forms and practices: these were expressions of different family and social groups, diverse roles, and economic means of Roman and late antique peasants.

In this respect, we might compare the farmstead of San Biagio near Metaponto and the farmhouse of Lamiozza, excavated in the territory of *Luceria* (Fig. 4.3). The former provides an interesting example of continuity of habitation: a small structure (150 m²), built in the second century AD, kept in operation as a residence until the early fifth century, with storerooms for foodstuffs and wheat; some expression of status, however, is evident in the set of heated baths (Lapadula 2012). It is not clear if the complex was managed by tenants as part of a larger estate, if we can use it as a prototype to trace a continuity of use for smaller farming blocks, or if it might help us to understand the 'settlement

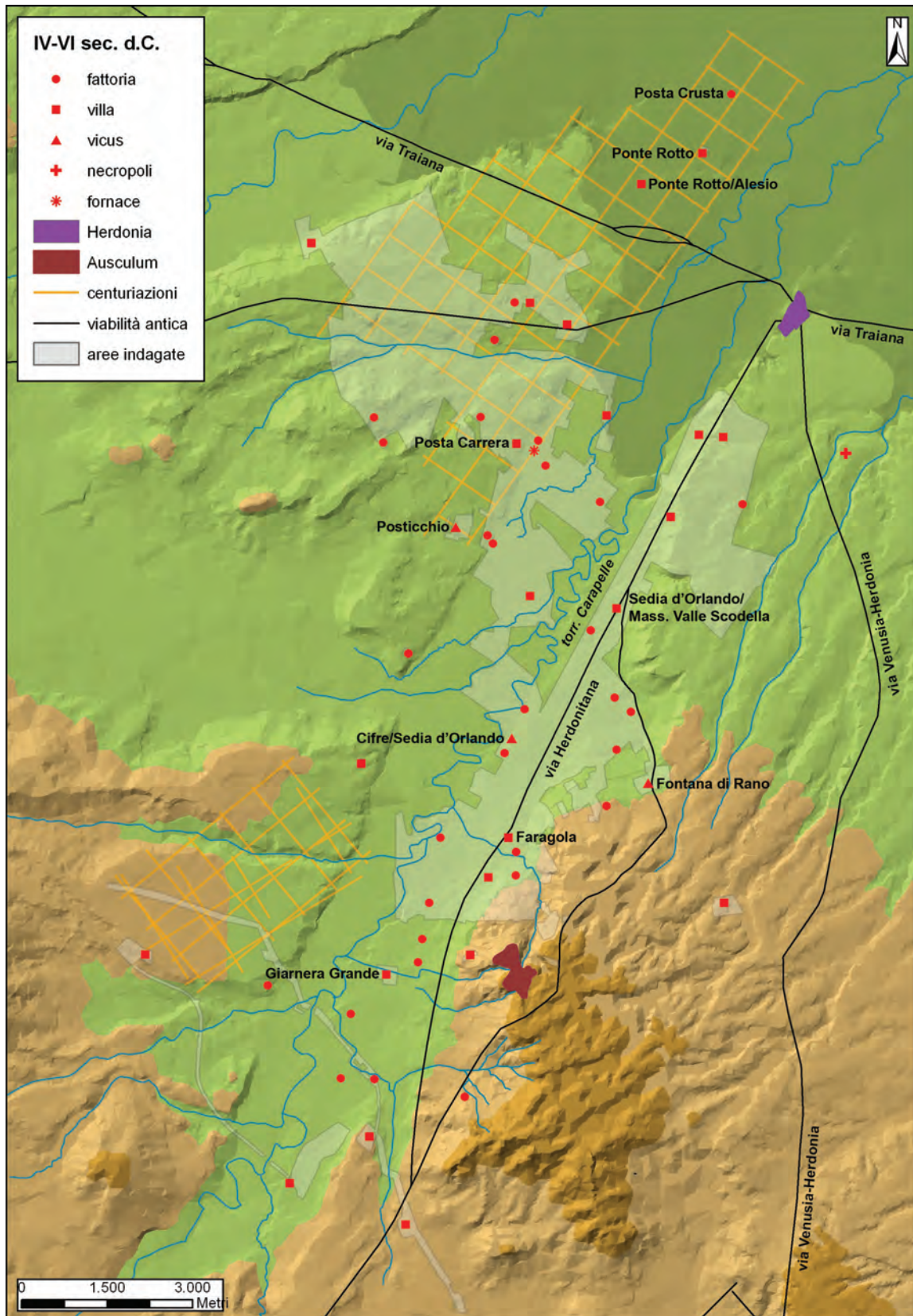


Figure 4.2 The villa landscape in the valley of the Carapelle River between the fourth and early fifth centuries AD (redrawn by Vincenzo Ficco)

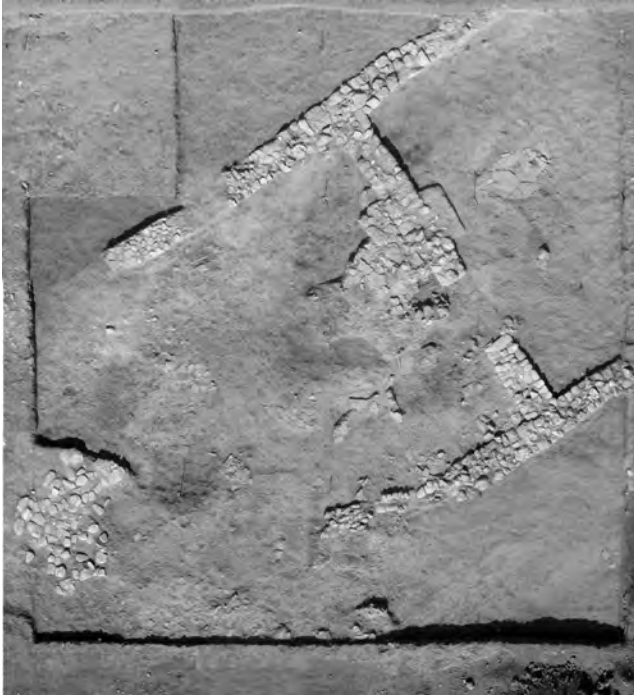


Figure 4.3 Late Antique 'farmhouse' at Lamiozza, Lucera (from Corrente and Cioce 2014)

phenomenology' of the 'middle class' who occupied the rural social spaces between the elites and the working peasants ('occupava tutti gli interstizi tra il livello dei proprietari e quello dei rustici' – Marazzi 2010, 681). What seems evident at San Biagio, however, is that the owner/tenant had income enough to preserve the functions and quality of the building, maintaining the rooms but also to invest in baths.

On the other hand, the second site, Lamiozza, was occupied during the fourth and fifth centuries, comprised just two rooms and was built in rough stone and clay. One room, with an earthen floor and a stove, was for living, sleeping and eating in, while the other was a multi-functional space for storage, etc. (Corrente and Cioce 2014). Such characteristics imply an owner of low social status and limited means. However, it is noticeable that the material culture from the site included some imported pottery (African terra sigillata C and D), iron and glass items, and a wide range of typologies of pottery, including locally or regionally produced tableware and storage containers. The farm owners could thus access nearby urban and rural markets, where they could buy tools and foodstuffs, as well as common consumable goods in the 'globalised' late imperial economy of the Mediterranean area.

The *vici* – termed 'aggregated settlements' or 'villages' – are also in need of fuller investigation (cf Tarpin 2002; Todisco 2004, 2012), especially since their central role in the late antique rural landscapes of Southern Italy has been already highlighted in the academic literature

(e.g. Volpe 1996, 147–149, 2005; Grelle and Volpe 1996; Arthur 2004; Goffredo and Volpe 2015a, 386). Indeed, the aggregated settlement/village is a typical rural feature in *Lucania*, *Bruttii*, the Salento, the area around Brindisi and Northern Puglia. A link has been established between these settlements and the steady growth in population attested from the mid-Imperial period to Late Antiquity, combined with the new management of agricultural work and the introduction of *coloni* (cf contributions collected in *STAIM 1*; De Mitri 2010, 41–46; Small 2011, 2014; Fracchia 2014; Marchi 2014; Goffredo and Volpe 2015a, 386–390).

Yet we know little about the morphology of these settlements, their topographical organisation, and the architectural and functional typologies of their buildings. Little can be extrapolated from the ancient sources, most of which are pre-fourth century in date. *Vici* are usually presented as densely populated and open/unfortified settlements, with markets and local fairs (these latter were independent from, if complementary to, the urban ones). Festus (cited in Lindsay 1913, 502 L) gives three definitions of the term *vicus*, the last of which is relevant here: '*id genus aedificiorum ... ad quae se recipiunt ex agris qui ibi villas non habent*'. The number of people '*qui villas non habent*' was broad and variegated and could have included diverse social groups.

Due to a lack of excavations, the archaeological evidence for these sites is heterogeneous, with our knowledge mostly based on the results of surveys. These point to small clusters of houses, usually for indirect management of farming or livestock, as well as more complex groupings, with houses, agricultural, storage and productive facilities. Overall, it is difficult to find homogeneous patterns in the way these late antique *vici* were formed: there are some with continuity of habitation and others built *ex novo* in previously uninhabited areas; some villages grew over abandoned villas or near complexes still in operation, to which they were closely linked; others were related to *stationes* or stopping-places on a road and thus the *cursus publicus*; and some of these settlements lay close to sanctuaries, holy places or military bases, used to control and guard the territory. Furthermore, from the mid- to late fifth century, many South Italian towns, now marginalised by the new economic and administrative settings of the Empire, underwent the so-called process of 'villaggizzazione' (see Arthur 1999; Volpe 2006b; Cantino Wataghin *et al.* 2007): examples include *Herdonia*, *Salapia*, *Metaponto*, *Suessula*, *Paestum*, *Blanda Iulia*, *Temesa* and *Locri*, which were transformed from towns into deeply ruralised, 'meta-urban' agglomerations.

Meanwhile, many coastal villages experienced a significant growth in size and wealth, functioning as exchange points for both Mediterranean and inland goods. Such are particularly numerous in Puglia and Calabria, where productive sites and settlements shifted increasingly towards the coasts. *Bardulos* (Barletta) is an emblematic case:

mentioned among the *stationes* of the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, sited along the *via Litoranea*, it seems to have grown in importance because it became part of a network of ports (some already developed in the early Roman Empire), linking *Canusium* to other river- and seaports in its territory (Goffredo and Volpe 2015b). The appearance of this place-name (*Bardulos*) implies a rising sense of communal identity for the people of this settlement, where a church was built in the mid-sixth century thanks to Sabinus, powerful bishop of *Canusium*.

More generally, both coastal and inland roads are seen to have played a significant role in the development of the so-called ‘*agglomerati secundari*’ (secondary settlements), as shown by the widespread distribution of place-names of various origins in late Roman itineraries. Only a few of the sites mentioned in these documents have been located archaeologically, notably Valesio on the *via Traiana Calabra* (Boersma 1995); the *vici* of *Scyle* and *Altanum*, both functioning as *stationes* along the coastal road between Reggio and Locri (Corsi 2000, 129–131); and the settlement of San Salvatore (near Paola) on the *Capua–Regium* road, perhaps the ancient *Clampetia* or the *statio* of *Erculis/Herculis* (Noyé 2006, 508; Sangineto 2001, 231–233).

Recent studies (Piepoli 2016) have revealed that the *via Appia* continued to play a central role in the development of settlements in *Apulia*. This offers a fascinating new scenario, in contrast with the traditional view that saw a ‘degradation’ of this road due to the ‘success’ of the *via Traiana* and of the coastal roads (Volpe 1996, 61). Archaeological investigations along the *Appia* show that several settlements, both scattered and nucleated, continued to thrive, and new sites appeared, stimulated by a regular flow of goods and people. Connecting *Venusia* and *Tarentum*, the *Appia* remained an important arterial road between the Bradanic area, the Murgian hinterland and the still thriving port of *Tarentum*. Furthermore, it developed as a strategic link between two important centres (*Venusia* and *Tarentum*) of textile manufacturing in *Apulia* and *Calabria*: one hosting an Imperial *gynaecium* (*Not. Dig. Occ.* 11.52); the other famous for the production of fine wool (*Edictum Diocletiani de pretiis* 21.2) and for a dyeing facility linked to the *sacrae largitiones* (*Not. Dig. Occ.* 11.65).

The *via Appia* also contributed to the success of the *vici* of Vagnari, which developed in the first century AD in a large *saltus* (part of the imperial/State *patrimonium*) of c. 25 km² between the Murgia and the Fossa Bradanica. This *saltus* might have been directly administered by the *res privata* (Small 2014) or, alternatively, was sold to private owners under *emphyteusis* or *ius perpetuum* (Vera 2014, 291–293). Vagnari was certainly reorganised in the late fourth century, when a shift in its economy is evident, from the rearing of sheep and goats to the introduction of cereal farming (for income, taxation and, especially, the free

market) (Small 2011, 31–34; Vera 2014). Excavation has revealed specialised activities, including brick production and metal-working, probably on a scale for exportation elsewhere.

This analysis introduces another aspect meriting further attention. Villages were articulated, complex systems, with an intrinsic, multi-functional nature and were specialised in diversified productions. This was dictated by the need for independence and autonomy, as well as by the presence of craftsmen with different technical and technological expertises. Archaeology reveals that these differences sometimes imply real specialisations, which developed from local traditions and resources, in response to the demands of the marketplace or of the dominant estates nearby (e.g. sustenance, payment of rents/taxes, annuities, *fructus* for the commercialisation).

Turchiano (2014; see also Favia *et al.* 2015, 525–530) has recently analysed the evidence for working spaces in late antique Southern Italy, suggesting that the process of centralisation of manufacturing and productive activities, which took place in rural areas between the fourth and fifth centuries AD, particularly involved the *vici*: these functioned as supply bases of highly specialised skills and productions. Thus, in *Apulia* and *Lucania*, the settlements of Calle di Tricarico, Trigneto and La Marmora specialised in ceramic production (Favia *et al.* 2015, 526, with bibliography); metalworking was predominant in the *vici* of Fontana di Rano, on the *via Herdonitana* in the Carapelle valley; facilities for the processing and conserving foodstuffs are known from the river port of Sedia d’Orlando, which was perhaps linked to the villa of Faragola (Goffredo *et al.* 2013; see below); while *figlinae* for the manufacture of Keay LII wine amphorae and similar containers, perhaps linked to yet undiscovered *vici*, have been located in the territory of Reggio Calabria (Pellaro, Lazzaro-Leucopetram, Bova Marina-Scyle, as well as San Salvatore, Paola) and in Sicily (Favia *et al.* 2015, 528, with bibliography). The connections between villages, ‘marginal’ areas (wetlands, hills and mountains, uncultivated lands, woodlands) and intensive and specialised exploitation of certain resources (salt, wood, tar, deposits) certainly requires further investigation. The strategic economic relevance of these areas in Late Antiquity has been already highlighted by Giardina (1997a, 1997b) and Traina (1992, 2002).

Despite the amount of new data available, many aspects of the multifaceted identity of late antique villages remain poorly understood; in particular, links between *vici* and towns or other settlements in the same region (e.g. control-dependence; interdependence) are difficult to establish. Furthermore, the differences in status between secondary settlements are not clearly identifiable. The re-organisation of the administration and tax collection within the late Empire might have accentuated hierarchical differences between *vici*; potentially this re-organisation favoured the



Figure 4.4 The complex of San Giusto, Lucera

largest villages, those closest to roads or those with roles as foci in certain rural districts (e.g. the *pagi*), such as in tax collection (both monetary and in kind). Taking into account several imperial constitutions (such as the *Tavola di Trinitapoli* and *Codex Theod.* I, 16.11; Giardina and Grelle 1983), we can hypothesise that these sites had offices where provincial officials recorded payments, facilities to host visits by the governor and, more importantly, contained granaries – *horrea publica*. Edificio B at Vagnari (late fourth century) might have been one of the latter structures: it had a front portico, a vast quadrangular inner courtyard and large outward-facing rooms used for various purposes, including food stores, stables and perhaps market-stalls (Favia and Giuliani 2011, 216–226). The partially excavated Triglione (Mondragone), near the *via Appia*, deserves further investigation in this regard. The site originated in the first century BC as a *statio*, but later grew into a larger settlement, becoming equipped with baths, residential areas and a set of large storerooms distributed around a central courtyard. The latter was accessible directly from the road, including by carts. These structures, identified as *horrea*, show signs of maintenance up until the mid-fifth century, when the entire complex was abandoned (Ruggi D’Aragona and Castaldo 2006).

It is also reasonable to hypothesise that administrative and managerial functions were already attributed to those sites which, chiefly in the fifth century, saw the development of rural dioceses. A notable and very well excavated example of this process and role is San Giusto (Lucera; see Fig. 4.4). The links between San Giusto, a ‘central place’ of the *saltus*

Carminianensis (a large imperial estate in the central region of the Tavoliere), and its rural diocese was strong (Volpe *et al.* 2013). Analysing the settlement’s distinctive history, Volpe (2008) has underlined how the presence of a bishop here impacted on the site’s shape and function, these very much influenced by urban models, notably its basilican complex; its articulated ‘craft centre’ with spaces for pottery production, metalworking, wool-treating and manufacture; and its market, similar to the one described by Cassiodorus in *Marcellianum* (*Var.* 12.15.5).

We would stress how this process of heightened rural emphasis came in a region of now ‘weak’ towns, such as *Arpi*, *Aecae* (Troia) and perhaps *Luceria*, these with marginal roles in the new provincial organisation. However, San Giusto did not follow the same path as other *vici* that gained the status of diocese and, subsequently, of town (e.g. *Turenum* (Trani), *Trapeia* (Tropea) and *Nicothéra*); in fact, San Giusto was abandoned in the Early Middle Ages (Cantino Wataghin *et al.* 2007, 100–102).

But what of the actual communities and their economies in the *vici*? What data can we draw upon to engage with these? Studies of the late antique inhabitants are few: for example, only two out of 98 burials from the necropolis of Vagnari date to the fourth century (Prowse *et al.* 2014), preventing any interrogation of the lives and health of the community of *vicani* during the village’s later phases. On the other hand, finds contemporary with and postdating the two late antique buildings excavated at the site indicate foodstuffs and pottery from North Africa, and, during the fourth and fifth centuries, pottery, oil and especially wine from the

eastern Mediterranean. Meanwhile, archaeozoological analyses have revealed for the mid-fourth to fifth centuries, a significant consumption of sheep and, to a lesser extent, pork, mainly as boiled meat (MacKinnon 2011). However, the significance of these data in relation to the size of the population remains difficult to evaluate.

Much more informative are the data from San Giusto: 108 tombs containing 120 inhumations dating from the mid-fourth to the early seventh century have been investigated, enabling insights into the lives, activities and diet of a significant part of the local population. We can note a limited number of elite burials, both in terms of location and construction quality, and a strong gender differentiation, with a predominance of male inhumations inside and around Churches A and B (De Santis 1998); overall, however, the impression is of a community of ‘peers’, with few status markers. Despite a fairly balanced, protein-rich diet among the adults (Buglione *et al.* 2015, 190), pathologies linked to non-agricultural work and vitamin deficiency were widespread (Sublimi Saponetti *et al.* 2005).

A community of villagers, agriculturalists and shepherds in good health, located in a favourable environmental and economic context, can also be traced at the *vicus* of San Marchitto (Corrente *et al.* 2012). The site has been recently pinpointed near another ‘weak’ town, *Herdonia* (Ortona), and is mainly known for its partially explored cemetery of 120 tombs and 178 individuals (109 infants/sub-adults, 61 adults), dating across the late fifth to early seventh centuries. The area so far excavated was seemingly dedicated to the interment of young children and, perhaps, adults with a background of special medical or ritual treatments (including trepanation). But several indicators of status differentiation, including post-mortem recognition, have been recorded. Grave goods, with a specific distribution and composition, occur in only 55 burials. ‘Special’ burial plots with enclosing walls can probably be associated with pre-eminent kin groups; these, noticeably, later attracted well-planned burials in their proximity.

A Resilient Countryside in Southern Italy (R.G.)

Much scholarly analysis has been applied to the theme of the ‘end of villas’ and, more generally, to the links between the crisis of villa settlement and the structural alterations in the countryside in Southern Italy from the fifth to sixth century (for example, Brogiolo 1996; Ripoll and Arce 2000; Francovich and Hodges 2003; Lewit 2003, 2005; Chavarría Arnau 2004, 2007; Brogiolo and Chavarría Arnau 2005, 49–68; Wickham 2009; Volpe and Turchiano 2016). Below we offer a few reflections based especially on the recent contribution by Castorao Barba (2014) on the transformation and reuse of villas between the third and eighth centuries. Despite some issues of interpretation of certain sites, his study employs an innovative quantitative and statistical approach in order to identify trends on a macro-regional level. According

to his results, the fifth century appears already as a turning point (Castorao Barba 2014, 282): 61% of the villas in Northern Italy and 46% of those in the South (including Sicily and Sardinia) became abandoned at this time. However, their deserted complexes then came often to be reused for a variety of purposes, primarily for small (mainly timber-built) settlements, but sometimes also (or otherwise) by necropoleis, religious structures, workshops and production facilities. The sixth century sees a higher percentage of villa abandonment, even in the South: only 14% of sites recorded as villas still in the fifth century remained in use into the next. Furthermore, the reuse of abandoned structures increases.

The ‘villa system’ seems to have lasted longer in Southern Italy, suggesting that at least parts of these areas formed the last strongholds of the large landholders, who spent vast sums of money in the enlargement, refurbishment and embellishment of some of these late antique residences (Volpe and Turchiano 2010). In *Apulia*, emblematic is the villa of Faragola which underwent full-scale renovation in the fifth century: a previous peristyle was now substituted with a summer *cenatio*, with floors in *opus sectile*, a masonry *stibadium*, and a scenographic use of water, typical of the famous Sicilian villas of Piazza Armerina and Cadeddi-Tellaro. During the same century, the villa of San Giovanni di Ruoti in *Lucania* was renovated and that of Quota San Francesco in *Bruttii* completely rebuilt; for each, aristocratic architectural features (notably apsidal rooms, *triclinia* and baths) were scaled back into more compact structures, almost fortified, with multiple storeys, towers and small courtyards instead of traditional peristyles.

But those cases of site continuity yet functional change (‘continuità topografica in discontinuità funzionale’ – Castorao Barba 2014) are even more significant than these late monumental renovations. ‘Change’ includes re-occupation, modified use, reuse and/or recycling of now abandoned complexes; but these all imply activity and even a general vitality of the countryside and, indeed, the current data suggest that the size of the population of *vici*, houses and farmsteads did not decline (or at least not until the first half of the sixth century), with a continuity of commercial exchanges at a local, regional and extra-regional level (see Volpe *et al.* 2015). These phenomena imply that the rural population was somehow resilient to those structural changes affecting the late antique large-estate system and, more generally, resilient to the local consequences of the decline of the military, institutional and economic components of the wider Empire.

From this point of view, the plethora of recent excavations and surveys make Campania a particularly interesting case study zone. Here, most of the villas (small and large, with residential or productive functions) were already abandoned by the mid-fifth century. In some areas, such as the middle and lower valley of the River Volturno, the *agri* of Capua and Pozzuoli, and the *ager* Falerno, this ‘villa crisis’ is

matched by a general rarefication of both nucleated and scattered settlements, an overall decline of manufacturing and a reduction in long-range commercial exchanges (Pagano 2009; Arthur 2002, 83–108). Other contexts present a different picture: at least until the earliest sixth century, the available data indicate that rural areas around Naples, Avellino, Benevento and the plain of Alife were still thriving, supported by a network of towns, ports and dioceses, which facilitated short- and long-range exchanges (see Fariello and Lambert 2009; Ebanista 2009; Busino 2009; De Simone and Macfarlane 2009; Marazzi 2015); however, villas had disappeared from these areas, replaced by smaller structures (the so-called ‘fattorie’ or farmsteads) or, more frequently, by villages.

While a new assessment of the Vesuvian area is ongoing, results already show that, between the fifth and early sixth centuries, despite attested raids by Visigoths and Vandals, the landscapes around Nola and Cimitile remained strongly active, like the *vicus* of Pompei–via Lepanto and other sites, some built over abandoned villas (see De Carolis and Soricelli 2005; De Simone and Macfarlane 2009). Among the latter, notable is the sequence at Saccaccio near Nola, where, during the fifth century, some rooms of the original residence (this spanning the second century BC to the second century AD) were reoccupied after a long period of abandonment; while some of the new structures might have had a residential purpose, they were mainly productive in nature, such as the *fusorium* and quenching pools of a smithy (Lubrano *et al.* 2011–2012).

The large villa of Starza della Regina, Somma Vesuviana, also saw late antique reuse. While the site’s different building phases remain to be clarified, the complex was probably constructed during the second century AD; the area so far investigated includes a spectacular terraced entrance on three levels (De Simone 2008; De Simone and Macfarlane 2009). When destroyed by an eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 472, some rooms were already in ruin and covered with vegetation. The construction of a press connected to a *cella vinaria*, of storerooms and subfloor cuttings to hold *dolia* (containing nuts and olives), and of a stable seems to predate the eruption.

Towards a New Order: The Sixth and Seventh Centuries (G.V.)

Thus, while the impact of volcanic eruptions and the long-term consequences of Visigothic and Vandal raids should not be underestimated, recent archaeological investigations have revealed that the rural landscape of *Campania* showed signs of resilience. Only in the sixth century does evidence occur of settlement discontinuity, including a general and drastic reduction of dispersed settlements and the development of urban *castra* and upland settlements that led to a clustering of the rural population. It is still not clear, however, if the

changes that affected the rural populations during the fifth century were linked to specific changes in land tenure or in land management. The rather precocious abandonment of villas in *Campania*, if confirmed more broadly, might have been caused by a process of disarticulation of the old aristocratic estates or, as hypothesised by Paul Arthur (2004), by an increasing distancing of the landowners from their actual estates in *Campania*.

According to the study by Aprosio (2008), between the fifth and mid-sixth century, both villas and rural settlements became conspicuously absent in the countryside near Brindisi and in the Salento. With the exception of Otranto – an important urban centre during the Byzantine-Gothic War and under Byzantine rule – and its hinterland, surveys have found no evidence for new or reused permanent settlements in this area. The decline affected also markets and local products.

Yet written sources hint at a very different picture. Sidonius Apollinaris (*Ep.* 1.10.2), for instance, mentions a load of wheat and honey from Brindisi to Rome during a food crisis (Volpe 1996, 262–263, 398); and the Byzantine emperor Justinian was particularly concerned with the damage caused by the Byzantine-Gothic War to the estates of the *possessores* in *Apulia*, *Calabria* and *Lucania*, given their importance for the wheat supply (Aprosio 2008, 168). The decline of rural sites has been therefore interpreted as the result of rural population movements from country to towns. Alternatively, some of the new settlements might have been entirely built in timber and other perishable materials, making them harder to trace archaeologically. In any case, the decline of the port of Brindisi and its hinterland emerges clearly.

Across the sixth century, despite local variations and different paces, the late antique system slowly disappeared. The reasons behind this were both endogenous and exogenous: the military and political instability following the Byzantine-Gothic War and the conquests of the Lombards/Longobards; the almost complete disappearance of the old Roman aristocracy; the abandonment of many infrastructures; notable climate and environmental changes; and epidemics. Though coming at a later time than in other areas, Southern Italy’s rural and urban landscapes were profoundly transformed during the sixth and seventh centuries. We should not associate this exceptional turning-point with the total end of settlement, since new forms of settlements emerged at this point, often linked to the previous ones. Catastrophism is out of place here, as are idealised views that put too much stress on continuity. Late antique villas were often reused (rooms, structures, decorative and architectural elements, building materials, etc.), sometimes ‘cannibalised’, or even radically transformed (Turchiano and Volpe 2016).

In particular, the landscape of villas, *vici* and farmsteads in *Apulia* did not change until the mid- to late sixth century, as attested by the sites of San Giusto and Faragola. The latter has been extensively studied thanks to 12 years of

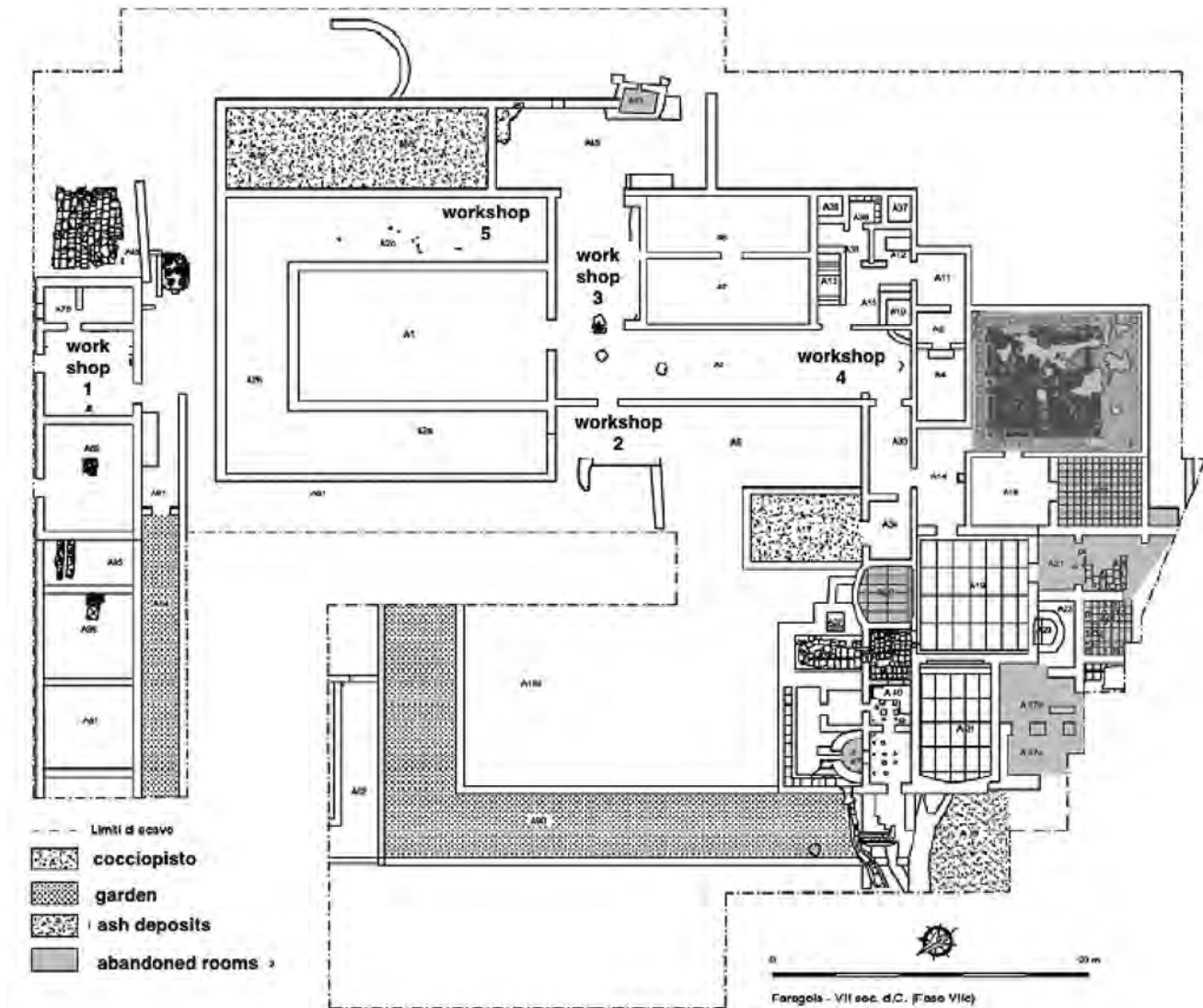


Figure 4.5 Faragola: plan of the late seventh-century settlement. Metal workshops are highlighted

extensive and ongoing excavations and multidisciplinary research (Fig. 4.5), enabling much better understanding of the impact that the ‘fall of the Empire’ had on this part of Roman Italy. The Faragola villa was inhabited until the mid-sixth century and then, during the seventh century, it was transformed into a complex settlement, with pottery, metal and glass workshops, storerooms, residences of some pretention, and several houses. It has been interpreted as an administrative centre for an estate directly managed by its owner, perhaps part of a palatine fiscal unit of Benevento (the *gaio Fecline*) (see Volpe and Turchiano 2012; Volpe *et al.* 2012; Turchiano and Volpe 2016).

The countryside of Southern Italy has been called a notable example of the ‘sistema agrario tardoantico’ (Vera 2005), thanks to the initiative of large landowners, senators, local aristocrats, as well as small landowners and *coloni*, emperors and bishops. After the sixth century, new forms

of wealth and power, and new ways of land management appear. This was a wholly different landscape, but one just as complex as the one that had just faded away.

From the Study of Rural Landscapes to their Cultural Heritage Protection (G.V.)

To conclude, we briefly discuss the policies of landscape and cultural heritage protection. The recent switch from local *Soprintendenze* to regional ones and the creation of Piani Paesaggistici Territoriali Regionali (‘Plans for the Regional Landscapes’) mark important turning points in the landscape (natural and historic) protection in Italy. The first Plans were approved in Puglia and, subsequently, in Tuscany (Mininni 2011; Magnaghi 2014; Marson 2016); they are based on useful tools such as the *Carta dei Beni culturali della Puglia* (Volpe 2011b). Protection is now

grounded on clear rules that incentivise a sustainable transformation of the landscape, substituting the traditional punitive approach based on restrictions. The landscape, with its rich historic and natural diversity and complexity, is now once again the main focus in every project of protection and development. According to the Faro Convention, which offers an innovative approach to the matter, cultural heritage ‘includes all aspects of the environment resulting from the interaction between people and places through time’. The involvement of ‘heritage communities’ is essential ‘in order to raise awareness about its value, the need to maintain and preserve it, and the benefits which may be derived from it’. Scholars involved in the study of late antique rural landscapes should rethink their social function and cultural role, come out from their ivory towers and get in touch with the people who live and work in and who often have deep roots in their local landscapes; they should also stay brave and inquisitive in dealing with the deep changes ahead (cf Volpe 2015 and 2016).

Post Scriptum: After the delivery of this paper, during the night of 6–7 September 2017, the archaeological site of Faragola was severely damaged by a fire, the cause of which has not yet been confirmed. This fire completely destroyed the roofs designed both to protect and make the site accessible. This sad and dramatic episode confirms the gravity of the problem of the protection of cultural heritage and historical landscapes.

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The Countryside of Southern Gaul from the Fourth to Seventh Centuries AD. Settlement, Landscape and Society

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Introduction

From the Alps to the Pyrenees, south of a line running between Nantes and Lausanne, the southern half of what is now France made up the Roman Diocese of the Seven Provinces: *Narbonensis Prima*, *Narbonensis Secunda*, *Viennensis*, *Alpes Maritimae*, *Aquitania Prima*, *Aquitania Secunda* and *Novem Populi*. From the time of the emperor Diocletian's reforms in the late third century AD, these provinces formed the administrative framework of southern Gaul.

Since the 1990s there has been an overhaul of the records, issues, and paradigms concerning the end of the ancient world and the earliest Middle Ages in this geographical area. The 1998 Montpellier colloquium (see Ouzoulis *et al.* 2001) was a turning point, marking a surge in research that has been sustained ever since. Long-neglected by scholars of ancient and medieval history for many reasons that cannot be set out here (but see especially Raynaud 2001, 473–475), the transition between ancient and medieval worlds has now been made meaningful by this research. In southern France, this *aggiornamento* has found positive expression for the future through multiple stimulating doctoral projects seeking to situate the period of the fourth to seventh centuries within broader contextual sweeps that encompass both the preceding imperial period and the ensuing Middle Ages (e.g. Chabert 2016; Duperron 2014; Favennec 2016; Gaucher 2011; Gilles 2016; Scrinzi 2014). This approach is now widely applied in regional surveys of settlement and the built and lived environment (Faure-Boucharlat 2001), funerary practices (Raynaud 2011) and forms of dwelling, and has generated a multitude of monographs (see the review of data in Schneider 2007a). Having long been avoided, the transitional status of the period is now something of an attraction.

A number of key trends can be highlighted. First, this accumulation of records and material has been aided by more refined dating. The long-term undertaking begun in the 1980s under the impetus of P.-A. Février and G. d'Archimbaud, spearheaded by the classical typology of ceramics and metal objects and then progressively backed up by carbon-14 dating, now makes it possible, in addition to ever more precise dating, to track trade flows continuously up until the seventh century AD with respect to both Mediterranean outputs and regional common ceramics (Bonifay and Raynaud 2006); more recently, investigations have been conducted into the organisation of potters' workshops that saw restructuring between the fourth and sixth centuries (Favennec 2016). Second, the development of rescue or preventative archaeology on major construction sites, both urban and rural, from the 1990s onwards has coincided with a multiplication of investigations on and around of what were until then modestly or poorly delimited and understood (or even unknown) sites.

A third aspect is the substantial output of documentation and analysis concerning northern and central *Hispania* which enables invaluable comparative perspectives on late antique and early medieval settlement structures and economies, as well as on production and trade (see, most recently, Roig Buxo 2011; Vigil-Escalera 2015b). Such studies, which can certainly be further developed, emphasise shared features and, in particular, the sustained circulation of common or coarseware ceramics around the urban centres of Nîmes and Narbonne, much as at Lugo and Vigo in Galicia, up until and even beyond the sixth century (Fernandez and Abreira 2016; Raynaud 2007a). Plainly, economies remained open on both sides of the Pyrenees.

Nonetheless, advances have not been equal in all regions. While the recent bibliography for the coastal

areas from Marseille to Tarragona and Valencia, and along the Rhône-Saône rivers is substantial (cf Duperron 2014), for the inland areas, the Atlantic and the south-west zone, studies of relevant material cultures remain little developed despite the potential for such from field studies; thus we hope for forthcoming publications on materials excavated at Toulouse, Eauze, Chassenon, Saint-Saturnin-des-Bois, etc. By contrast, these sorts of studies have already begun in Auvergne, heralding a renewal of interest (Chabert in Trément 2013, 277–313; Chabert 2016).

These advances, which confirm the early marker-posts set out at the 1998 conference and which re-adjust them on certain points, cannot all be listed here. Instead, readers will find below a brief overview and a selected bibliography covering three major themes: settlement, forms of dwellings, and cultural change. In these domains, a ‘return to ancient times’ is often necessary to avoid truisms and dispense with the value judgements that litter the period. Likewise, the time-slice to be discussed here should not deceive us; periodisation is a straitjacket from which we must escape so that other divisions that have gone unnoticed can emerge and processes can be followed through to their conclusion. Chris Wickham’s words are very apposite here: ‘rapid change did sometimes occur ... But each time it had longer roots, which are more interesting and important to explore than the often contingent crisis’ (2005, 13–14).

Settlement

Density, diffusion and polarisation: these major themes of the Montpellier colloquium have constantly guided current research forwards. Ten years on, a new review placed developments ‘between stability and stagnation: towards moderate prosperity’ (Schneider 2007b, 14).

Although first mainly studied in coastal areas, these questions have also been asked of inland zones: the Valais (Wiblé 1998), the Jura Mountains (Billoin and Fellner 2013), the upper valley of the Rhône (Gaucher 2011), the Lyonnais and Dauphiné (Faure-Boucharlat 2001), the middle valley of the Rhône in the Valentinois area (Gilles 2016) and the Cèze valley (Canillos 2014). Thanks to surveys using convergent methods, these areas reveal trends comparable to observations for coastal zones: continuous settlement is attested everywhere despite a sharp decline in the late second and the third centuries AD, followed by a recovery in the fourth or fifth centuries with the creation of new settlements of various sizes. This convergence, which seems quite marked at first sight, involves many time differences and contrasting geographical patterns of dissemination within a (generally) very busy landscape. Thus, around the *civitas* of Valence-*Valentia* (Drôme), four areas with separate profiles can be identified: whereas the floodplain on the right bank of the River Rhône and the Ouvèze valley display similar profiles with early growth and a peak from the first to the third centuries, sites on the left bank of the river peaked from

the second to fifth centuries. In the same study, the foothills of the Vercors, to the north-east, followed a quite diverse trajectory with a density half that of the other zones and a late and fleeting optimum in the second half of the fourth century and the early fifth (Gilles 2016). Further south, in the valley of the Cèze, a tributary of the Rhône, the same trends and the same local variations prevailed (Canillos 2014).

In lower Languedoc, a previously studied sector (Raynaud in Ouzoulias *et al.* 2001, 247–274), the valley of the Vidourle sheds light on the changing pattern of settlement on the scale of a catchment basin. In this geographical space between the Cévennes hills and the Mediterranean Sea, a geographical dimension is illuminated that is overall poorly discerned in more localised studies, namely the reversal in settlement density: the settlement pattern, which was first dense in the High Empire in the northern hills and sparser on the coast, reversed in the third century when the hills became ‘depopulated’ and settlement became concentrated on the coastal plain and delta until the sixth century (Scrinzi 2014, figs 40–45); this pattern can be explained by the fertility of the land and the proximity to the urban centres of Nîmes and Maguelone.

Other advances relate to the Auvergne territory, which are crucial because they concern a Massif Central that long remained a blank spot making north–south comparisons difficult. Here again, with many nuances, the late Roman period saw sustained settlement until the fifth century, before progressive decline set in in the sixth and seventh centuries (Trément 2013, 268–280).

By contrast, studies of the provinces of Aquitania and Novem Populi (Novempopulana), where documentation essentially focusses on villas, remain rare and compact (see also Esmonde Cleary, this volume). An unusual dynamic prevailed there in which occupation in Late Antiquity largely dominated that of the early Empire; the scope of such findings, influenced by the historiographical impact of the grandiose layouts of the fourth- to fifth-century estate centres and the recurrence of necropoleis of the Early Middle Ages in their ruins, can be questioned (Cabes 2015).

Population figures remain difficult to assess, despite the settlement surveys that have been undertaken. Rescue excavations in particular have shown that each rural ‘site’ did not necessarily have occupants but could be shelters for tools and equipment or provide other facilities. However, known site numbers and sizes point to a population optimum in the first and second centuries, followed by a marked downturn from the end of the second century and in the third, and then a limited recovery in the second half of the fourth and fifth centuries; decline really begins at the end of the fifth and more generally in the sixth or seventh centuries, if with chronologies varying from one area to another. The increased number of dwellings being excavated should make it possible in the medium-term to put forward figures based on a critical analysis of the accommodation capacity of buildings compared with the surface areas of

the establishments; this seems an achievable ambition but will require some sound statistical work.

It is difficult indeed to delimit within this late antique settlement pattern the proportion of immigrant populations of Germanic origins: How can Goths be recognised? Since the nineteenth century, the ‘ethnacist’ interpretation of funerary practices through items of clothing and adornment, tomb construction types (often transition from tiles to wood) or the topography of the necropoleis (*Reihengräber*) saw these practices as signs of ethnic origins. When this search for identity – with its attempts to differentiate between Gallo-Romans, Goths and Franks – is abandoned, the uncertain and even contradictory character of such signs appears, particularly in Mediterranean regions where practices are coloured by continental exoticism but remain essentially within the ancient/classical tradition. Such signs are now understood within a less literal approach and reveal the early intermingling of populations in which cultural environment, religious orientation and a sense (or otherwise) of ethnic belonging came together. As shown by the examples of Gozquez (Madrid), Lunel-Viel (Languedoc) and Pla de l’Horta (Gerona), a sense of belonging is more clearly expressed in the topography of necropoleis of rural communities (Vigil-Escalera 2015a; Agusti Farjas and Llinàs Pol 2012; Raynaud 2011 and 2015a). After the fifth and sixth centuries, which were marked by the diversity of practices, differences diminished and even vanished by the seventh century, a little earlier or a little later depending on the location, thereby opening up a difficult period for archaeologists, who struggle to find distinctive criteria: the merger seems to be complete. Here again, closer comparisons between southern Gaul and Hispania (and perhaps also Italy) might reveal still imperceptible population processes and structures. Emphasis should be laid on the necessary multiplication in future of isotopic analyses of chemical elements as markers of migration ... or immobility.

The forms and settings of material life also contribute to this challenge to the ‘ethnacist’ paradigm, by revealing continuities of building techniques and architectural models. While features of Germanic culture can be adduced as evidence – for instance the adoption of the semi-excavated technique of the *Grubenhöfen/Sunken-feature or Pit-huts* – such things remain rare and confer only a discreet touch of the exotic on inhabitants who, until the seventh century, maintained a strong Gallo-Roman tradition (Raynaud 2014). Similarly, until the sixth century, the *instrumentum* and foremost common ceramics maintained an antique-style that give few clues as to any (still hypothetical) Germanic influence (Raynaud 2007a).

Forms of Dwelling and Social Forms

Agglomerations and villages, villas and scattered farms made up a varied landscape whose dynamics and dominant trends are becoming clearer thanks to recent excavations that

illuminate the diversity of situations. The picture of land dominated everywhere by estates, long the standard theme of the countryside of the Roman Empire, is now superseded by a nuanced picture in which the villa occupies a variable position, often dominant but sometimes dominated in the vicinity of agglomerations and/or peasant farmsteads. Having made much misuse of uniform and interchangeable models, archaeologists must now, without losing sight of the general frameworks of classical society, analyse local contrasts and resituate them within long-term processes. This, I would argue, often requires taking a fresh look at classical times.

Whether they are viewed as a legacy of the past or as emerging new features, rural agglomerations were long overlooked or ignored by classical historians and archaeologists, who saw no place for the village in countrysides dominated by estate economies, while medievalists thought that the village only later around the year 1000 (see Wickham 2005, 516–517). Work in recent decades has shown that, in fact, in variable forms that were constantly changing, agglomerations and villages made up an essential meshwork in the landscapes throughout the Imperial period and sometimes even earlier: ancient villages and medieval (or one perhaps ought to say ‘Christian’) villages display marked disparities but they can overlap in the field, where sometimes one overlies the other.

The notion of grouped dwellings covers a wide range of forms. Topping the hierarchy, the best-known are urban agglomerations, which are referred to as ‘secondary’ because they were subject to the primacy of the *civitas*. Systematic investigations in Languedoc, Aquitaine and Auvergne, and more widely throughout the provinces of Gaul, have shed light on their typology, highlighting the diversity of models and patterns of change (Raynaud 2002; Maurin 1992; Baret 2015). These ‘cities in the fields’ were often Romanised forms of earlier Gaulish *oppida*, hillforts that had come down to the lowlands. While monumental archaeology highlighted the importance of public monuments of the High Empire, questions have been asked more recently about the more discreet chronology of the late occupation. Depending on the regions, one-in-three to one-in-two agglomerations were occupied until the end of classical times – and the number increases regularly with new discoveries or new interpretations of the records.

Let us take the example of the agglomeration of *Cassinomagus/Chassenon* (Charente) in the *civitas* of *Lemovice*. On the edge of the agglomeration, large public baths built in the first century AD were destroyed by fire in the late third century, according to the authors ‘either accidentally or in connection with a barbarian raid depending on interpretations’ (Hourcade and Lebreton 2002). The bath-house was partly restored in the fourth century before being damaged again in the early fifth. While retaining its overall size and structure, the building no longer operated as baths; the interior space was partitioned and

taken over by a group of dwellings until the sixth century. If the idea of a 'hamlet' suggested by the authors remains hypothetical until we understand the setting better, it is plain that a core of population persisted there, which seems to be confirmed by the existence in the tenth century of a *vicaria Cassenominse*, the seat of Carolingian local power (Bourgeois *et al.* 2006). While the example of the conversion of the baths is exceptional because of the state-of-repair in which they have been conserved, the case was common enough, since many more examples could be given of ancient agglomerations that were transformed wholesale in the fourth or fifth centuries by the loss of their monumental adornment and a reduction in their surface area, yet retained an administrative and/or religious function in the Middle Ages. In Narbonensis, we can cite the emblematic case of *Medilium/Roujan*, where the temples of the old religious centre were taken over in the sixth century by a Christian complex (Schneider 2014, 425–430).

This change results in a tighter hierarchy, with agglomerations joining small groupings of less than five hectares, for which the notion of village was genuinely required as early as the Roman period. Such local centres, comprising perhaps up to a few hundred inhabitants, are still poorly known because it is difficult to trace them beneath the medieval villages that superseded them. The case of Lunel-Viel (Hérault) reveals the trajectory of one such centre which are often attested from the Early Empire and remain plentiful in Narbonensis across the late Roman to early medieval transition (Raynaud 2007b, 2011 and 2015b).

More discreet but more enduring forms of clustering have been identified in the Valais region of Switzerland, where the importance of villages, with their roots in the Iron Age and virtually all occupied until the end of the classical period, is noted (Wiblé 1998, 61–62). In the upper Rhône valley, excavations at the village of Gamsen (Brig-Glis) have highlighted this continuity (Benkert *et al.* 2014): the first group of a dozen or so buildings, modest dwellings of 30–35 m², emerged in the seventh century BC; this compact, nucleated settlement then experienced a sustained series of changes alternating between expansion and contraction, and possibly also relocations, reaching its peak between the first and third centuries AD. The progressive abandonment, without evident violence, occurred in the latter third century and is supposedly related to socio-economic or political change. However, the site retained one dwelling house and a building converted into a mausoleum, while several groups of tombs occupied deserted sectors, and traces of sustained farming activity are claimed; these elements emphasise the permanence and proximity of the 'new' village, which may be located beneath the present-day village of Glis.

Besides the villages that made up a pattern in the lowlands and valleys, the higher ground saw the emergence from the fifth to seventh centuries of a new form of grouped habitat. Long identified and first interpreted as rough-and-

ready temporary wartime refuges, these establishments have been the subject of new analyses that reveal, in reality, forms of organisation, construction and activity that are indicative of concerted and sustained settlement. Excavation at Roc de Pampelune (Hérault), for example, casts light on the case of an agglomeration ringed by an enclosure, with a church and a baptistery possibly of public status, and engaged in a varied range of farming and craft activities. A more urbanised dimension is claimed at Saint-Blaise-Ugium and Constantine in the hinterland of Marseille (Schneider 2007a, 26–29). In the Rhône valley, meanwhile, the site of Malpas, at Soyons, shows that hilltop settlements cannot be contrasted with lowland ones, as most locations could co-exist in arrangements yet to be defined (Gilles *et al.* 2013; Gilles 2016).

The overall geography of these establishments is also still to be clarified. While research into the Massif Central and the Jura reveals comparable situations (Billoin and Fellner 2013; Schneider 2014, 439–442), by contrast the position in Aquitania and Novem Populi remains uncertain.

Despite their organisation and their extent, these new agglomerations were often abandoned at an early date, with most of them not surviving into the eighth or ninth centuries. As they do not display any obvious military function, these small sites seem to have been oriented more towards the exploitation of new farmlands, which would seem to reflect some degree of population surge. Perhaps because they were part of a 'pioneer front', they had every chance of being the first to be affected by any change of circumstances. The hamlet or village of Pouydesseaux (Landes), with a grouping of some 20 small earth and timber buildings, should be ascribed to an analogous context; this cluster was perhaps occupied for just a decade or so and is suggestive of site linked to a land clearance, but its dating remains uncertain, between the seventh and ninth centuries (Cabes 2015, 193).

Further north in the Jura mountains and the upper Rhône valley, we can cite the Camp du Château at Salins-les-Bains (Jura; Billoin and Fellner 2013) and in the south, in Tarraconensis, the hilltop dwellings of Puig Rom and Sant Julia de Ramis which fit the same palette of establishments (Burch *et al.* 2015). In Old Castile, judging from its size, topography and metalworking activity, the site of El Castillon (Zamora; Sastre Blanco *et al.* 2015) was organised along similar lines to the settlements of Pampelune and Angoustrine (Pyrénées-Orientales; Campmajo *et al.* 2007). Plainly, socio-economic structures do not comply with political boundaries.

The pattern of the grouped settlement was enhanced by a third configuration when estates lost their coherence and changed in the fifth and sixth centuries into nucleated settlements that initiated the formation of early medieval villages. Archaeology has been slow to prove this long postulated sequence, but the data are now accumulating: in Narbonensis Prima the villa sites of Embonne (Hérault),

and La Ramière and Codols (Gard) show such clusterings of dwellings (Schneider 2014, 41–43; Pomarède 2012; Maufras 2015); at Saint-Saturnin-du-Bois, in Aquitania, we can trace diverse stages of the process until the eighth century (Charente-Maritime; Maurel *et al.* 2015); and at the opposite end of the region, excavations at Vandœuvres, near Geneva, reveal the implantation of the church in the former villa before the village emerged (Terrier 2005, 75–78).

Attested to in *Hispania Tarraconensis*, notably around Barcelona (Roig 2011), the formation of villages within the framework of former estates was not a complete break with the past but a new departure for the society of Late Antiquity, since the nucleated settlements remained anchored in one and the same place and with lands that were still exploited and delineated – *mutatis mutandis*. But this was a new departure because the classical estate economy, to the extent that it survived the changes, must have been markedly altered within the social landscape that then evolved. Indeed, there is no reason not to contemplate the continuation, at least in part, of the former relations of domination even within hamlets and villages erected among the buildings of the villa, although it is perhaps difficult for archaeologists to pursue this aspect. What archaeology does observe more specifically, however, is the relative smoothness of the change and its progressive character between the fourth and seventh centuries. It was probably within this timespan that entities with still indistinct contours formed, which scribes were to name from the eighth century onwards with the term ‘villa’, to designate a small agricultural territory en route to becoming fixed around a nucleated settlement.

As Wickham observed at the conclusion to the Montpellier conference, the old estate system that dictated spatial organisation as a function of land ownership was superseded by ‘une nouvelle manière de conceptualiser le terroir ... désormais c’est l’habitat et pas la propriété qui structure l’espace’ (2001, 566–567). While new in its generalisation, such a conceptualisation was perhaps not entirely new if more or less significance, depending on the location, is attributed to the ancient village forms illustrated by the case of Lunel-Viel where, from the High Empire onwards, the estate economy could be less hegemonic than expected.

The revised role played by estates invites us to nuance the scope of change defended until then. The organisation of rural estates is more clearly asserted in Aquitania and Novem Populi where villas show signs of longer periods of occupation and underwent spectacular architectural transformations at various dates between the fourth and sixth centuries that made them, in some instances, true ‘palaces in the fields’, as for Séviac, Montmaurin and Saint-Emilion (Balmelle 2001; see Esmonde Cleary, this volume). A world away from the village society of modest landowners and tenant farmers, the sumptuous reception buildings were designed as much for receiving guests as for demonstrating landed power. This aristocratic hold

over the landscape was not displayed with the same power in the cities of Narbonensis. The model is to be found at Loupian as at Codols or Jalionas, where the fourth and sixth centuries also saw the construction of large rooms with apses, but this hall-type architecture seems less pronounced (Buffat 2011; Pomarède 2012; Royet 2015). This could be because of the difference in wealth from one province to another or a more or less prominent concentration of ownership. Despite their relative discretion, a number of the villas related to the southern cities, from the Alps and the Rhône to the Pyrenees, remained prosperous until the sixth or even seventh century, as shown by studies at the villas of La Gramière (Castillon-du-Gard) (Buffat 2009) and Saillans (Drôme; Le Roy *et al.* 2011), albeit of course with change in materials (some timber-works) and, rarely with churches imposed.

Despite these regional nuances, these elite constructions, which were fewer in number but more imposing than earlier estate buildings, markedly changed the countryside, where private luxury became more visible: it was spoken of and peasants glimpsed a little of it when going to pay their farm rents. This opulence was supplemented by constructions of domanial or public churches that demonstrated the shift of evergetism from the towns to the countryside, where it ensured a higher, more intimate profile for the elites.

Rarer, but obeying the same rationale, was the late creation, at the end of the third century, of an estate like that of Eyguières (Bouches-du-Rhône) that superseded a neighbouring agglomeration deserted at the same time; with several rearrangements, the establishment was to remain occupied until the eleventh century (Pelletier and Poguet 2008). Beyond the end of Roman rule, the occurrence of estates therefore does not express the simple survival of an inherited form but rather the adaptation of the dominant class to the new socio-economic set-up. It is this second hypothesis that is supported by the discovery of an unusual establishment at Malène (Lozère). Here, there was no legacy to inherit and instead we see the *ex-nihilo* construction in the late fifth century of a rich complex with all the attributes of an estate centre: baths, colonnade, reception rooms and a vast cistern, all built *romano more* and protected by the steep relief, together with an early bastion guarding the approach. Here, the high location was not to defend a small town but was a show of power, perhaps episcopal (Schneider and Clément 2012). In a more austere and defensive form, we come back to the display of power as earlier in Aquitania, notably the *burgus* of Pontius Leontius mentioned in c. 462 by Sidonius Apollinarius (Balmelle 2001, 114–115, 118). No doubt other cases are to be found and await excavation to demonstrate the resilience of the estate organisation and the elite owners.

Right at the bottom of the scale of wealth and social rank came the peasant farmstead. Long eclipsed by the importance attributed to villas, farmsteads of early to late Roman date and beyond, often stone-built but unmortared,

are being revealed by rescue archaeology and new examples excavated each year (Raynaud *et al.* 2013). This broadening of perspective provides an opportunity to revisit the method: to take up the question ahead of the study period, and as early as the first and second centuries AD, so as to de-mythify the achievements of the High Empire and only compare things that are comparable, avoiding disparaging judgements about late or 'post-classical' constructions. Farmsteads, where both productive functions and living quarters were joined, and around which the family buried its dead, attest to a largely unknown dimension of rural activity; this has been the subject of recent review (Ouzoulias 2008). Examples indicate a continuation of forms and activities until the sixth and seventh centuries and probably beyond that. Does that come as a surprise (Raynaud 2016, 81–87)? It is obviously more difficult to detect the social standing of their owners and occupants, whether free peasants, dependents, settlers of a remote estate. There was probably a mix of such situations that varied with time and place.

Culture and Society. What was the Extent of Christianisation?

More than a religious breaking point, the transition from classical Roman polytheism to Christian monotheism formed the fabric of a broad cultural change that is difficult to track closely from the *realia* studied by archaeology. French research (which is Roman Catholic by tradition) has generally treated the question from the angle of 'Christianisation', which is considered as a major point of inflection of classical civilisation. From this perspective, it seemed logical enough to associate 'Christianization and settlement of the countryside' (Colin 2008), leading to the documenting of the construction and proliferation of churches and monasteries in the landscape and with a stress put on the militant role of bishops in spreading the new faith. It was also a question of going to 'the origins of the rural parish' in order to grasp how both material and spiritual rural life were framed over long centuries (see Delaplace 2005).

This paradigm is now undergoing strong revision, being both overturned from the inside by the discoveries of archaeology and trapped in a pincer movement from before and after by research into places of polytheist worship under the Empire and by research into 'the medieval invention of space' centred around the question of the parish and the diocese (Mazel 2016). Was the parish anything other than the episcopal scheme to promote a spatio-temporal unit for controlling the country folk, a scheme that did not fully materialise and find support until the year 1000? A synthesis of the rural churches of Gaul from the fifth to the eighth century casts much light on the socio-economic context of the earliest churches that were not always – indeed, far from it – new or replacement anchor-points for settlement but were often caught up within a pre-existing fabric.

Although the 'Christian mission' remained at the heart of such creations, 'paraliturgical' practices were also affirmed among the *possessores*, who were interested as much in the material life of the local authorities and in land rent as they were in pastoral life (Schneider 2014, 467–468).

Emphasising this pastoral life, written sources, with the outputs of Gregory of Tours and the *Life of St Martin* foremost, forged the image of Christianisation as part of the mission of militant urban bishops wresting backward, rustic populations from their former beliefs. Did bishops, heading columns of zealous Christians, rooting out idolaters, and invoking fire and brimstone where necessary, launch assaults on temples, ones still used and ones that were empty, deserted by the old gods?

Archaeology can offer a possible alternative interpretation or gloss to hagiographical accounts by revealing how 'pagan' sanctuaries could fall into disuse and sometimes into ruin already from the late second century and, more generally, in the third and fourth centuries. A recent synthesis shows that this process of loss does not seem to have been religious but was part of a broader context of decay of civic authority and of diminished evergetism (Van Andringa 2014; Golosetti 2014, 186). While the old cults sometimes put up resistance, expressions became less prominent: thus at *mithraea* like those at Martigny (Valais) or Mandelieu (Alpes-Maritimes) ongoing rituals (by a few individuals?) were reduced in the early fifth century to discreet money offerings, shortly before pagan cults were fully prohibited by the imperial authorities (Wiblé 2008, 156–157; Fixot and Codou 2001). In terms of religious substitution, the old idea of polytheist sanctuaries that the public authorities handed over to Christians, who supposedly converted them into churches, seems contradicted by the scarcity of archaeologically attested instances, to the extent that one might ask whether this was merely a historiographical myth (Creissen 2014). Contrasting with the temples of Roujan/*Medilium* that were converted into churches in the sixth century or later, how many other sanctuaries remained outside the religious sphere? And although mausolea appear associated with the first phase of many churches in the Geneva region, they were already part of the early Christian funerary environment, with no need to look for any polytheist origins.

In examining the modes and means of the religious transition, Dumézil observes in the Theodosian Code a series of measures from the late fourth and early fifth centuries which were designed to avert violence at the time of destruction of temples by bishops and to protect heathens from the brutality of 'zealous and covetous Christians' (2012, 50–57). In opting for a discretionary principle in order to maintain social peace, the State tasked the civil functionaries with closing and deconsecrating pagan sanctuaries that had fallen within the scope of imperial *res privata*.

Although it alters our perception of the context of Christianisation, this revised outlook – that sees Saint

Martin, Saint Avit and other assailants and their followers as either reprehensible troublemakers or edifying fictional heroes – does not minimise the scope of the transformation brought about by the construction of many churches in both the countryside and the towns in the fifth and sixth centuries. But it is worthwhile wondering about the presumed delay in Christianisation of the countryside and the claim that peasants of the hagiographical literature found it very difficult to adopt the new religion. Was this fact or fiction? The density of palaeochristian buildings around the centre of *Medilianum*, in the polity of Béziers, where there were at least five churches in an area of 2000 ha, suggests the records might turn the question around: Was the city equally well provided for? (cf Schneider 2014, 429, 454–457).

Finally let us turn to funerary practices and the topography of graves. In brief, the appearance in the fifth century and the affirmation in subsequent centuries of the attraction of certain revered tombs (of martyrs, saints and others) and by funerary churches expresses a radically new eschatology attuned to Christian expectations of judgement and salvation. Things occurred smoothly but much more slowly than expected: from early signs of changes of attitude towards the dead and graves in the fifth century till the affirmation of the Christian cemetery in the ninth and tenth centuries, the movement was slow and very late in eschewing ancient/classical practices. This is shown, for example, by the attitude of Sidonius Apollinarius, who was a bishop, certainly, but primarily an aristocrat with a classical culture and as such steeped in deep-rooted traditions (Raynaud 2006). *Christian death* only slowly replaced *the death of the Christian* and that is what makes the study of necropoleis so interesting – provided that we do not lose our way by looking for Christian signs that are not necessarily there – when it comes to casting light instead on the development of sensitivity towards the deceased as the attenuated reflection of the new beliefs (Raynaud 2011, 81–91).

Conclusion

The nuances and progressive character of the transformation of settlement, forms of dwelling and the religious landscape of Late Antiquity reflect the sturdiness of a complex and ramified system within which the nesting of economic structures and social groups created a form of ‘self-sustaining mechanism’. Neighbouring villages supplied the essential pool of manual labour to the rural estates that had to draw on many hands to bring in harvests, and, in return, the villages found a standby resource through which to extend the self-subsistence of the family farm. So complex a system could not be brought down by a single cause over a short period of time. In speaking of what in time became rather stable populations and forms of settlement that reflected changes in society, I admit that I have barely mentioned the productive activities that underpinned continued settlement.

This is because, despite much evidence of sustained exploitation and beyond the evidence of some particular farming or craft activity, the prevailing orientations remain poorly perceived; in particular the scope of transformations brought about by the apparent decline in vine-cultivation from the third century is not clearly perceived (Raynaud and Van Ossel 2012).

Within the cyclical time of agricultural labour and in the precarious conditions of their existence, did contemporaries perceive these changes and if so how? Ultimately the recent advances in our understanding raise more questions than they answer. Despite the refinements in dating criteria, are the processes that affected settlement, economic and social structures, and cultural life not exaggeratedly spread over the long duration by which archaeology is bound? Was the wave of creation and abandonment of sites genuinely synchronous or did it cover a timespan that we do not yet grasp? Would the backwardness of the region in some particular aspect be perceived so forcefully if chronologies were more closely spaced? Furthermore, the question of the agents of change remains the crux of the problem. Does the (later than expected) decline of villas indicate a new economic deal that was more conducive to peasant farming, which itself was less prone to the produce of the land being channelled off by the aristocracy, as Wickham (2005, 520–534) thinks? Although slavery was no longer a means of production, archaeology says little about changes in the servile population. But we do see how villages now became features in the rural landscape.

Population figures, that have been assumed to dip or plunge with epidemics of plague, remain crucial to understanding the rhythm and extent of change. DNA studies by McCormick and others should make it possible in the medium-term to map outbreaks and measure the degree to which populations were weakened, but benchmark data need to be patiently constructed to do this.

DNA and isotopic studies will help also in determining better how far we are dealing with migrants, Germanic or otherwise. From new settlement forms to population structure, how did migrants, potentially arriving in successive waves from Germanic Europe, fit in? Investigation of funerary practices and material deposits, which were long assumed to reflect the geographical and/or cultural origins of the groups buried, has its limits and uncertainties, advances at Lunel-Viel, Pla de l’Hortal and Gosquez notwithstanding. Will the future multiplication of palaeogenetic analyses provide data that can better address the problem?

Finally, Christianisation, so long perceived as involving adversarial militant conversion, appears on the contrary to have unfolded without any major disruptions within a religious landscape largely deserted by the old polytheistic gods. This last point, illuminated from the outside by research into classical graves but also back-lit by medievalists, is prompting a revision of the most solidly-anchored

certainities about the imperial and medieval worlds. The archaeologies of Late Antiquity offer scope to question our ‘classics’: what better reversal of fortunes could there be for this period whose full historical depth is yielding to now thriving research? Rather than feeling the usual melancholy for a bygone empire, we should see in this an enjoiner to interpret things stoically: History could have been different, but it wasn’t!

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Villas, Visigoths and Evangelisation: Rural Archaeology in Late Antique *Novempopulana*

Simon Esmonde Cleary

Introduction

The late Roman province of *Novempopulana* in the far south-west of Gaul was a province with a very particular identity. In the fourth and fifth centuries AD the archaeology of this region was highly distinctive, above all as regards its plethora of villas. It was this territory that, in the fifth century, was to become the heartland of the Visigothic Kingdom north of the Pyrenees until its defeat by the Franks at the battle of Vouillé in 507, though the archaeology of the Visigoths remains problematic. Alongside these cultural and political developments, the evangelisation of the region was set in train, resulting in a Christian component to the archaeology. Thus, despite its apparent geographical remoteness, the province was in fact integral to the fortunes of the late Roman Empire north of the Alps and the Pyrenees and to the origins and growth of the Visigothic Kingdom.¹ Arguably it was only with the defeat of the latter that the region became marginalised within a Frankish kingdom whose main interests lay elsewhere.

The size and quality of many of the villas of late Roman *Novempopulana*, the impact of the Visigothic settlement in south-west Gaul and the history of the Kingdom of Toulouse, the Christianisation of the cities and countryside of the region have all, not surprisingly, been the focus of scholarly attention over a long period. From the later twentieth century the archaeology of the region has seen programmes of survey and excavation that have transformed our understanding of these major strands in the study of the area and period. The information and arguments derived from these projects will be summarised in this paper to make them more available to an anglophone audience and allow them to take their place alongside other regions of the late Roman West.

This paper will first present an outline of the province with its agrarian and other resources and ask how these may

have conditioned patterns of settlement and exploitation of the landscape. It will then address the three major topics embodied in the title: the villa landscapes of the fourth and fifth centuries; the impact of Visigothic settlement with, in due course, the fate of the Kingdom of Toulouse; and the evidence for the evangelisation of the countryside, especially as it related to the settlement pattern inherited from the late Roman period.

Novempopulana: A Particular Province

Late Roman *Novempopulana* comprised almost all of the territory between the mountain chain of the Pyrenees to the south, the Atlantic to the west and the River Garonne to the north and east, though the territories of Toulouse, Agen and Bordeaux, the first in *Narbonensis I* the other two in *Aquitania II*, included much of the land along both sides of the Garonne. Geographically and topographically the area of the province of *Novempopulana* can be divided into three broad zones: in the south lay the Pyrenees and their foothills, rising relatively steeply on their Gallic side; the western part contained the area of the Landes, the large tract of sandy plains and marshy areas inland from the Atlantic littoral; but most of the province consisted of the rolling countryside of medieval and modern Gascony, in large part a huge outwash fan from the Pyrenees dissected in the centre and east of the province by a series of rivers flowing north from the Pyrenees to the lower course of the Garonne. In the south-west was the basin of the Adour, flowing north from the mountains then west to the Atlantic and capturing the rivers issuing from the western Pyrenees.

Each of these zones afforded distinctive resources, particularly for varied agrarian regimes. The Pyrenees remained largely wooded through the Roman and into the

early medieval period (Galop *et al.* 2015), with stands of economically useful timber such as fir and pine at higher altitudes and beech, birch and oak on the lower slopes. Above the tree-line and interspersed with the woodlands lower down were mountain pastures, used for summer grazing in a regime of transhumant pastoralism, down indeed to the modern day. In addition, there were important mineral resources such as iron and salt, both exploited in the Roman period, marble (exploited particularly in the central Pyrenees), and some copper and gold, the latter used in the late Iron Age though not proven for the Roman period (for all these, see papers in Sablayrolles ed. 2001). By contrast the Landes appears to have been an area largely devoid of Roman-period activity once north of the Adour basin (Boyrie-Fénié 1994, 34–44), though given the specialist habitats of the sandy areas and the marshes it may be that this picture will be modified in the future. East of the Adour and between the Garonne to the north and the mountains to the south were the fertile valleys and plateaux of Gascony, the Coteaux de la Gascogne. Much of this area was dominated by the argilo-calcareous ‘*terreforts*’ very suitable then, as now, for cerealiculture, viticulture and silviculture (Colléoni *et al.* 2013, esp. 213, fig. 3). To the west lay the poorer soils, the sandy loams of the ‘*boulbènes*’, more suitable for viticulture and silviculture. The river valleys could have provided pasture-lands for livestock rearing, perhaps as part of a seasonal transhumance regime between the mountains and winter lowland zones. Overall this central and eastern part of the province was rich agricultural land suitable for a range of profitable agrarian regimes.

The Great Late Villas

The archaeology of fourth-century Novempopulana has been dominated by the study of the cluster of villas, some of them very luxurious, concentrated in the province and neighbouring areas of Aquitania I and II (Balmelle 2001, fig. 19; Balmelle, Petit-Aupert, Vergain 2001, figs 1 and 2), and containing the complex and classic sites of Montmaurin (Haute-Garonne), Séviac (Gers) and Valentine (Haute-Garonne): Montmaurin was excavated between 1946 and 1960; Séviac saw investigations from 1959 to 1996; and Valentine was partly destroyed by a hydro-electric canal in 1924 but with small-scale excavations by Fouet (the excavator of Montmaurin) in the 1970s. Because of their scale and their decoration in marble and mosaic this class of opulent villa was for a long time the almost exclusive focus of research on the region’s rural settlement, risking the impression that there was little or nothing else in the countryside save grand estates – an impression, as will be seen below, now known to be very misleading.

This is not the place to reprise in detail the extensive recent publications relating to these villas (in particular Balmelle 2001; cf Réchin 2006), but some of the defining features of

these complexes and their significance should nevertheless be outlined. These major villas are characterised by their great size, the surface area of the entire establishment often over 10,000 m², and the elaboration of plan and decoration (Balmelle 2001, ch. 2.3). In the majority of cases the principal residential areas were disposed around colonnaded courtyards, some semi-circular (Balmelle 2001, 125–134, discussing Lescar-St-Michel (Pyrénées-Atlantiques), Montmaurin and Valentine). The principal rooms were grouped around these courtyards, but it is seldom easy to identify the use/s to which they were put. One exception is the apsidal reception-room, a feature of several villas such as Jurançon-Pont d’Oly (Pyrénées-Atlantiques), Lalouquette (Pyrénées-Atlantiques) or Séviac, at which site the apsidal room was later extended. Other elaborate forms such as cruciform or poly-apsidal chambers occur, as well as rooms which may have been *cenationes* or formal dining-rooms (Balmelle 2001, 159–176). Bath-houses stand out, these also very often of elaborate plan involving domes and semi-domes and richly decorated in marble and mosaics; the baths at Séviac afford a particularly good example of these (Balmelle 2001, 178–197).

These complexes stand out for the richness of their architectural and interior decoration, surviving above all in the form of marble and mosaic (see Balmelle 2001, ch. 4). Marble was used for architectural elements such as columns, column-capitals, entablatures and door-cases as well as wall-facings and paving. The marble-quarries of the Pyrenees yielded white marbles (often with grey veining) as well as breccias (*griottes*) in a range of other colours, notably a range from pink to purple along with greens and some yellow; the St-Béat quarries yielded white marble of statuary quality. It is increasingly appreciated how important statuary was as an element of decoration of aristocratic residences in Late Antiquity (cf Stirling 2003, ch. 3 for south-west Gaul). At some villas such as Montmaurin (Fig. 6.1), not far from the quarries, the decoration throughout was largely in marble with little use of mosaic. By contrast, Séviac, further from the mountains, featured extensive use of polychrome mosaic, with marble confined to important structural elements such as columns and capitals. The mosaics of south-western Gaul were overwhelmingly polychrome geometric schemes, some of considerable ingenuity and including *trompe-l’oeil* schemes (Balmelle 2001, 245–252, 263–278); figured mosaics of plants, animals, humans, deities and mythological scenes were uncommon. The impression overall is that mosaics functioned more as polychrome ‘carpets’ rather than embodying significant cultural and visual images in their own right.

These villas are interpreted as the expression of a rich regional aristocracy in south-western Gaul in the fourth century as portrayed above all in the writings of Decimus Magnus Ausonius (Sivan 1993). For this aristocracy their villas were a means of displaying their wealth and taste,

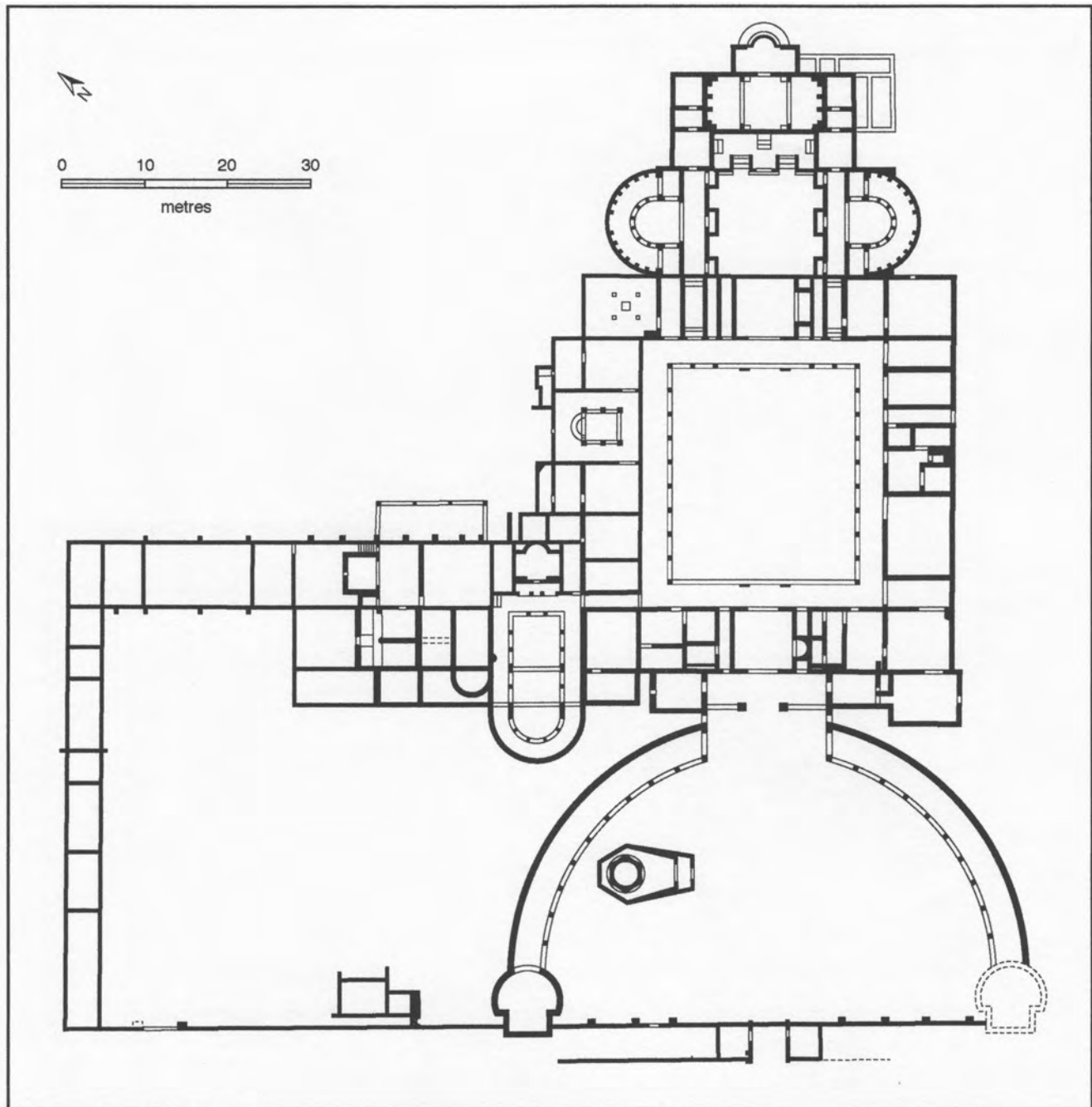


Figure 6.1 Montmaurin villa, plan (drawing by H. Buglass)

partaking of the late Roman vocabulary of power and wealth mobilised by the emperors and the senatorial aristocracy and also expressing concepts such as *otium* (cultured leisure) and *paidea* (formal classical education) and the attitudes these instilled (Esmonde Cleary 2013, ch. 5). Ausonius himself, of course, would have experienced such personages himself at first hand during his illustrious career at the imperial court in Trier as tutor to the young Gratian and later Praetorian Prefect of the Gauls, before retiring to the area of Bordeaux. He may be only one of a wider pattern of aristocrats from

the south-west of Gaul forging careers for themselves in the imperial service and transferring the vocabularies of imperial power and representation to their own extensive estates.

Agriculture and Settlement Patterns

A major problem with our understanding of these great villas has been the concentration of excavation and research on the *pars urbana*, the residential buildings, meaning that our knowledge of the *pars rustica*, the agrarian dependencies,

and the agrarian economies that sustained them has until recently been deficient (cf Balmelle 2001, 54–62 for the evidence then available). The situation has been improving markedly as a result of the reorientation of research priorities and field projects whose evidence and conclusions will now be outlined. To make a bridge between the world of the great villas and that of the economy one might quote from Ausonius' description (*Carmina* II, 21–23) of his *herediolum*, 'little inheritance', an estate somewhere in the vicinity of Bordeaux:

Agri centum bis colo iugera, vinea centum
iugeribus colitur, prataque dimidio,
silva supra duplum, quam prata et vinea et arva²

The picture here is of a mixed agriculture dominated by grain and grape with some pastoralism and a perhaps unexpected amount of woodland. The importance of grain from south-western Gaul is reinforced in the textual evidence by Ammianus Marcellinus' accounts of the preparations for campaigning by the Augustus Constantius II in AD 354 and the Caesar Julian in 358, with the former delayed by exceptional spring rains and flooding which hindered the transport of supplies from Aquitania and the latter having to wait till warmer weather allowed the transport of supplies from the region (Amm. Marc., *Res Gestae* XIV.10, XVII.8).

Archaeological evidence for these forms of agriculture remains somewhat lacunose. The rolling countryside of Novempopulana to the north of the Pyrenees was, and remains, well-suited to the growing of grain; but as yet there is a shortage of information on villa-linked installations such as granaries or processing areas or equipment such as mills, and analyses of plant remains are as yet scarce so it is not possible to reconstruct the crops grown and in what proportions. Nevertheless, that cerealculture was an important, and probably dominant, form of agricultural exploitation cannot seriously be questioned.

The place of viticulture has recently been undergoing re-evaluation, partly as a result of new fieldwork and partly as a result of systematic review of the evidence for the areas north and south of the Garonne (Balmelle *et al.* 2001) – areas to this day not unknown for their wines. The Roman-period evidence currently concentrates north of the Garonne in Aquitania II, but for Novempopulana possible *chais* and vine-dressing sickles have been identified (Balmelle 2001, 56–60). The recent excavation (Colléoni *et al.* 2013, 219) of the *chai* (a building for the pressing, fermentation and storage of wine) at the villa of Lestagnac, St-Médard, north of Lectoure (Gers), may help identify other examples, something supported by the presence of other long, rectangular buildings on aerial photographs of villas in the Lectourois.

That woodland comprised more than half the area of Ausonius' *herediolum* may come as a surprise. It is in part a

testament to the often under-appreciated importance of wood in antiquity as a resource for everything from structures and means of transport or furniture to fuel, with the consequent need to treat woodland as a managed resource. In the case of Ausonius' *herediolum*, given its proximity to Bordeaux one might speculate as to whether timber was grown commercially also to supply that city, including perhaps for Bordeaux's maritime activities such as ship-building and cooperage. The major stands of timber on the Pyrenees have already been mentioned as possibly an important economic resource in the Roman period. Felled timber could have been transported down the River Garonne (as in modern times) or the Adour.

Only a very incomplete picture of pastoralism is available for Novempopulana. A form of agriculture important not only for the range of products derived from living and dead stock (cattle, sheep/goats, pigs), it was also valuable for maintaining soil fertility. It could also be practised in areas less suited to the growing of grain. As noted, the proximity of the Pyrenees may have contributed to a regime of seasonal transhumance between the plains and the mountains.

As well as a gradually developing understanding of the economic base for Novempopulana, recent research, particularly survey work, has been transforming older images of the rural settlement pattern, reducing the emphasis on the large villas and opening up a range of types and sizes of settlement, indicative of a more complex agrarian and social landscape than simply one of large-scale domanial exploitation. The most systematic survey work (Colléoni *et al.* 2013) has been in the territory of three *civitates* in the eastern part of the province, those of the Ausci (around Auch), the Elusates (around Éauze) and the Lactorates (around Lectoure) (Figs 6.2 and 6.3). For the first two the surveys were terrestrial, targeting different pedological and topographical zones (for detail for the *Ausci* see Colléoni 2009; for the *Elusates*, see Boyrie-Fénié and Sillières 2006); for the *Lactorates* the results come from extensive aerial survey (Petit-Aupert 2006). In all areas a range of site-types was detectable, either by building materials, tile and artefacts in the field surveys or by crop-marks in the aerial survey. An attempt to harmonise the varying classificatory schemes of these surveys on the basis of five criteria (Colléoni *et al.* 2013, 217) – site dimensions; morphology of buildings; construction materials; luxury elements such as marbles and mosaic; the material culture – resulted in a fivefold classification: '*grandes villas*' (>10,000 m² in extent with evidence for luxury elements; '*petites villas*' (<10,000 m² in extent with little or no evidence for luxury elements); '*villas de taille indéterminée*' (sites yielding luxury elements but of unknown overall extent). Smaller and simpler than the '*petites villas*' were the '*fermes*', with evidence for simple construction materials and a restricted range of material culture. Smallest and most enigmatic of all, the '*gisements*

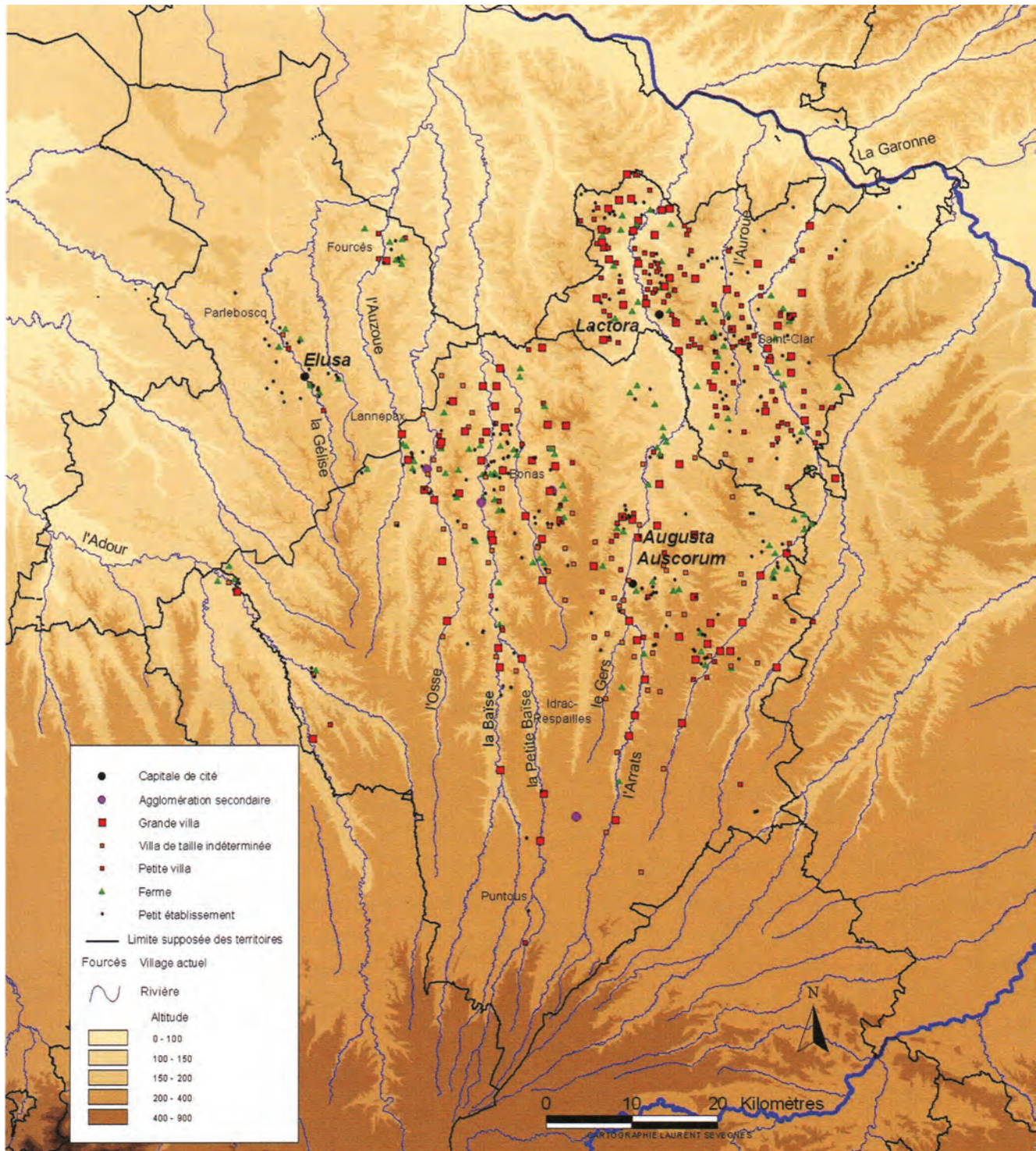


Figure 6.2 Distribution of different types of rural site in the civitates of Auch, Éauze and Lectoure (from Colléoni et al. 2013, fig. 2). Site symbols: Black circle: civitas-capital (named); brown circle: agglomération secondaire/'small town'; large red square: grande villa/major villa; small brown square: villa de taille indéterminée/villa of unknown extent; small red square: petite villa/small villa; green triangle: ferme/farmstead; black dot: petit établissement/small site; black lines: presumed boundaries of civitates.

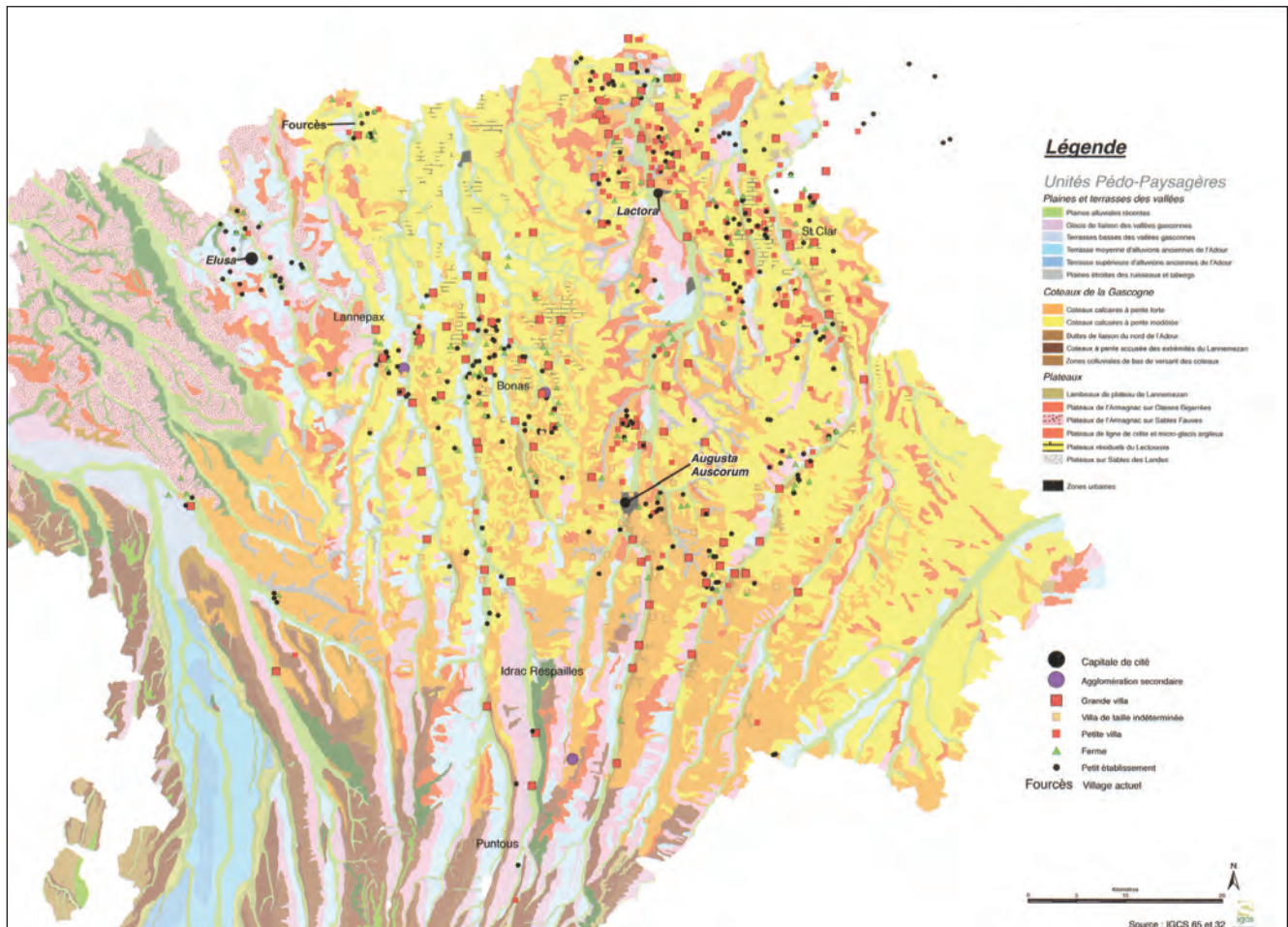


Figure 6.3 Distribution of different types of rural site in the civitates of Auch, Éauze and Lectoure against soil-types (from Colléoni et al. 2013, fig. 3). The areas predominantly in yellow to the north and east are the *terreforts*, with the *boulbènes* and other poorer soils in pinks and purples to the west and south. Site symbols: black circle: civitas-capital (named); purple circle: agglomération secondaire/'small town'; red square: grande villa/major villa; small pink square: villa de taille indéterminée/villa of unknown extent; small red square: petite villa/small villa; green triangle: ferme/farmstead; black dot: petit établissement/small site.

de faible superficie covered between 50 m² and 200 m², their presence betrayed by finds of *tegulae*. Despite their differences, it is clear that although the '*grandes villas*' are well-represented numerically and by percentage, the more modest establishments predominate.

The importance of the '*grandes villas*' of course would not have been a simple matter of numbers; economically, socially and culturally they stood at the top of the regional hierarchy. All these site classes were well represented along the valleys of the rivers flowing north from the Pyrenees to the Garonne, such as the Auzouze, the Baïse and the Gers, and the plateaux between in the territories of the Ausci and Lactorates, especially on the '*terreforts*' (Colléoni et al. 2013, figs 2 and 3). These areas are interpreted as largely specialising in cerealiculture and possibly also pastoralism where the topography was less suited to the plough (*ibid.*, 217–221). The location of viticulture was less easy to identify, though the presence of the Lestagnac *chai*

at one of the villas of the Lactorates may indicate greater prevalence than the present data allow. By contrast, the territory of the *Elusates* to the west, though it contained villas on the '*terreforts*' in the northern survey area around Fourcès, yielded far less evidence for occupation on the '*boulbènes*' around Éauze itself and hardly any to the north around Parleboscq, giving rise to the suggestion that these areas specialised in viticulture around Éauze, for which these soils were and are eminently suited, or in viticulture or silviculture around Parleboscq (*ibid.*, 220).

A similar conspectus of the evidence from the *civitates* south and west of the three outlined above (Réchin et al. 2013), comprising the territories of the Bigorri (around Tarbes), the Aturenses (around Aire-sur-l'Adour) and the Aquenses/Tarbelli (around Dax), reveals marked differences. Unsurprisingly there were two large zones essentially devoid of villas: the mountainous parts of the Pyrenean chain above an altitude of 450–500 m to the south and the sands and

marshes of the Grande Lande to the west. In general villas were more common in the eastern part of this region, among the Bigorri and the northern Aturenses, but becoming sparser the further to the west, despite the presence of good-quality soils. In this area settlement types, particularly villas, were not so closely linked to soils as further east and north. The reasons for this are not yet clear. There is, on the other hand, plenty of evidence for exploitation and occupation of 'marginal' lands such as the mountains and the marshes and sands of the Grande Lande, which would have hosted very specialised forms of agriculture to complement the cerealiculture, viticulture and pastoralism of the eastern parts of the region.

East of this region and south-east of the territory of the Ausci lay the territory of the Convenae (around Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges) with contrasting agricultural regimes in the mountains of the south and the plains of the north (Sablayrolles and Beyrie 2006, 75–82; cf Esmonde Cleary 2007). The southern part of this *civitas* lay in the mountains, and so was probably dominated by seasonal pastoralism and silviculture as well as the exploitation of the mineral resources of the uplands, in particular marble. North of St-Bertrand, in the valley of the Garonne and the rolling lands to the north was a landscape of villas, including 'palatial' sites such as Montmaurin and Valentine, though there has not yet been the systematic survey to locate the full range of settlement types comparable with that in the neighbouring *civitates*.

Because of the lack of excavations, it is as yet difficult to form a clear idea of chronological developments, particularly in the late antique period. Such dating as we have for the major villas (Balmelle 2001, 98–118) suggests that their main period of expansion and luxury was from the second half of the fourth century into the first half of the fifth, though many of these late villas developed out of existing complexes, some going back to the early Empire. The reasons why this period saw such lavish investment remain as yet remain obscure. It may be relevant that the later Roman period had seen the abandonment of the majority of smaller rural establishments, the '*fermes*' – a phenomenon noted both for the area of the Ausci (Colléoni 2009, 266) and the areas to the west and south-west (Réchin *et al.* 2013, 232), and apparently largely accomplished by the end of the second century. This has led to the claim that the later Roman period saw the rise to dominance of the landed proprietors who expressed their wealth in large villas at the expense of the more modest establishments and their owners or tenants. Be that as it may, the surveys in the eastern part of Novempopulana have shown that the range of settlement types and thus the settlement and social hierarchy remained much more complex than simply domination by the major landed proprietors.

Nevertheless, the evidence from late Roman Novempopulana and the neighbouring parts of Aquitania I

and II does clearly demonstrate that this was the pre-eminent region of Gaul for the expression of landed wealth through quality villas and their appurtenances (Balmelle 2001, fig. 19). These villas and the textual evidence of writers such as Ausonius and Sulpicius Severus for the later fourth century, and later Paulinus of Nola and Paulinus of Pella in the early fifth, indicate that the region, though far from the Rhône and the Rhine rivers, was nonetheless fully aware of the wider world and of its social hierarchies and cultural formations and its elites participated with vigour in these. It was a region of very considerable agricultural wealth and that wealth was displayed in the architecture, decoration and other appurtenances of the great villas. Economically, too, Novempopulana was by no means peripheral as the circumstantial mentions of the need for Aquitanian supplies in the 350s make clear, and the archaeology of the rural landscapes certainly attests to the substantial surplus production of the province.

'Barbarians' and the Fifth Century

In 418 the emperor Honorius promulgated the so-called *Saluberrima Constitutio* re-establishing the council of the *Septem Provinciae*, the diocese covering the southern half of the Gauls, and enjoining an annual meeting in August at Arles. The governors of Novempopulana and Aquitania II were specifically allowed to send representatives rather than attend in person because of the distance (Giraud 1873, 646–648). In that same year according to one source, the Goths under Wallia, based at the time in north-eastern Spain, accepted resettlement in the Garonne valley 'from Toulouse to the Ocean' – '*Gothi ... sedes in Aquitanica a Tolosa usque ad Oceanum acceperunt*' (Hydatius, *Chronicon*, 69–70). Another source dates the settlement to the following year, 419, stating '*data ei (sc. Wallia) ad inhabitandum secunda Aquitanica et quibusdam civitatibus confinium provinciarum*' ('giving him to inhabit Aquitania II and some *civitates* of neighbouring provinces': Prosper, *Chronicon*, s.a. 419). The latter shifts the Visigothic settlement further west, and the 'neighbouring provinces', some of whose *civitates* were ceded to the Goths, logically should be Aquitania I and Novempopulana. With hindsight this has been seen as a defining moment: the foundation of the Kingdom of Toulouse with the consequent dispossession of the Roman authorities of the region. At the time, by contrast, it may have seemed more of an expedient, placing a potentially troublesome group in what Honorius considered a distant part of his realms.

Much of the discussion of the fate of the countryside of south-west Gaul in the fifth century has traditionally been written taking textual evidence as the starting-point, in particular that relating to the conditions under which the Goths were imposed onto or integrated into the existing population and patterns of ownership and occupation. The

root of this approach lay in narrative and legal sources describing how Goths here were provided for under the terms of an arrangement called *hospitalitas*. The meaning of this euphemistic term has elicited a long and unresolved debate. The term originated in late Roman military practice whereby troops could be billeted on a property-owner, receiving one third of the property during their stay. *Hospitalitas* then came to describe the conditions under which 'barbarian' peoples were settled on Roman territory. The variations and vagueness of most of the texts as to what this actually meant have occasioned the debate on whether the incomers were or were not granted ownership of land itself? Were they billeted on one third of a property? Did they get one third of the revenues from the property? Did they get one third of tax revenues from the area? Did they become outright owners of one third or more of the property? Or was it one-third or two-thirds of whatever it was that was being allocated? That there is so much possible variation may well mean that *hospitalitas* was a variable rather than a unitary phenomenon.

The evolution of the debate in relation to the settlement of 'barbarians' on imperial territory has been judiciously summarised and the problems of such evidence as there is (mostly much later than the early fifth century) reviewed by Guy Halsall (2007, 422–447). He is surely right in arguing that for the area with which we are concerned here there was a fundamental difference in the power relations between Romans and Visigoths at the time of the initial settlement as opposed to that of the promulgation of the Law Code by Euric, king of the Goths, nearly a century later in 506, which talks of land rather than the yields of that land. In the former situation the Goths were under the dominion of the Romans and might well be accorded the sort of *hospitalitas* for troops with which the imperial authorities were familiar, that is a share of a property but no rights over possession. A century later dominion lay with the Visigoths and their king, and so apportionment of land and its possession would have been within their competence. Halsall (2007, 440–441) dates the shift to the mid- to later fifth century, by which time the Visigoths had emancipated themselves from Roman control and established themselves as an independent political entity. For the purposes of this paper, what is important in this text-derived debate is that at the initial settlement the existing patterns of land ownership seemingly remained intact and indeed the Goths had a financial stake in not unduly disturbing the *status quo*; the Roman provincial landowners had to make shift to adjust to the new realities but overall remained masters of much of their landholdings. The account of Paulinus of Pella (grandson of Ausonius and from near Bazas in north-western Novempopulana) in his poem the *Eucharisticon* (ll. 575–578) of how a Goth wished to purchase a property of his in the South-West while Paulinus was holed up in Marseille, may give a vignette of how control could be ceded

while the property remained intact: indeed, in this case, the Goth paid Paulinus for the property (albeit in Paulinus' opinion not paying enough!). Even as control came to be exercised by Visigothic kings and nobles there was still an inertia in favour of maintaining property rights as these came increasingly into Visigothic hands. The archaeological evidence has, for the most part, not been used in the *hospitalitas* debate, partly because, even in south-western Gaul with its great villas, it was always difficult to extract information on property ownership from such evidence. But if the archaeology is emancipated from the dead hand of the *hospitalitas* debate it still has importance for the dynamics of rural settlement in Novempopulana as it turned into the Kingdom of the Visigoths.

To stay for a moment with the question of the Visigoths: the archaeology is remarkable for the shortage of evidence for their presence in Novempopulana in the course of the fifth century; in the words of Edward James '*sans les sources historiques, aucun archéologue n'aurait pu soupçonner l'occupation de l'Aquitaine par les Wisigoths de 418 à 507*' ('without the historical sources no archaeologist could have suspected the occupation of Aquitaine by the Visigoths from 418 to 507': James 1991, 149). By and large this situation still obtains: there remain remarkably few items of material culture which could be ascribed to the Visigoths, or at least to 'Germanic' or 'exotic' persons; what there is can principally be linked to the Sîntana de Mureş-Chernyakhov culture of the Pontico-Danubian area and consists of objects such as the three bone combs with semi-circular projections from the area around Auch and Éauze (Balmelle 2001, 35). A recent survey of such material to be published by Jean-Luc Boudartchouk adds some dots to the map, but they remain sparse, even at Toulouse, the seat of the *regnum Gothorum* (Bach *et al.* 2002). In part this material lacuna must be because the Goths arrived in Aquitaine in 418/419 having already passed 40 years in their peregrinations around the European provinces of the Roman Empire; their material culture would increasingly have become disconnected from that of their area of origin and they would correspondingly have become habituated to use of available Roman provincial products for many aspects of life. As a result, when they settled in Aquitaine they would have adopted many of the ways of life of their hosts. This is not to say that they lost any sense of a Gothic identity, as most clearly they did not; their consciousness of themselves as an ethnic entity was expressed politically through the establishment of a kingdom and obedience to a king; probably socially through Gothic lineage and familial structures; religiously through their adherence to the Arian variant of Christianity; and by the time of the Law Code of Euric 'Goths' and 'Romans' appeared as two distinct legal identities. It is just that such constructors and expressions of identity have very poor visibility in the archaeological record.

The tiny amount of 'Gothic' material must be set against the overwhelming predominance of material culture in Roman provincial style from the sites of fifth-century Novempopulana. The most abundant and best-studied material is, not surprisingly, pottery. Recent study of the ceramic sequences from well-excavated sites has begun to clarify the sequence of forms and fabrics and thus provide elements of a chronology, especially the urban sequences from Toulouse (Dieulafait *et al.* 2002) and inside Novempopulana at Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges (Dieulafait 2006). Through the first half of the century there were products distributed on a regional scale and beyond such as DSP (*dérivées des sigillées paléochrétiennes*) from centres at Bordeaux and in the Languedoc, along with regional oxidised fabrics. The scale and incidence of these attest to an economy still integrated over a wide area, even if links to the Mediterranean atrophied. In the second half of the century the oxidised wares disappeared and the DSP-style products saw a simplification in both the repertoire of forms and their technical execution, with the Languedoc products ceasing to be imported into the region. Local production, often imitating DSP forms, became more common through the later fifth and into the sixth century. Once past AD 500 the amount of ceramics diminished markedly relative to the preceding century and our ability to date them becomes less sure. Economically this points to an increasing dis-integration of economic structures and of regional systems in favour of more local circuits of exchange.

Alongside ceramics, glass is increasingly developing as a dating medium for the region (cf Foy and Hochuli-Gysel 1995, 1996; Marty 2006) and will certainly become more important and sensitive medium as research continues. The typological sequence from the fourth into the sixth and seventh centuries is established in its broad traits, giving a sequence for the sixth and seventh centuries at least as good as, if not better than, the ceramics. The evidence from Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges (Marty 2006) showed this period to be the one when glass was at its most frequent.

An outline chrono-stratigraphy for ceramics and glass can now be apprehended, even if only hazily, but dating and understanding what was happening archaeologically in the countryside through the fifth and into the sixth century remain a highly inexact enterprise. This is mainly down to two factors. The first is the lack of sites which have been excavated to the necessary standards to identify and exploit late stratigraphic sequences: in some older excavations they may well have been cleared away in order to get at the splendours of the fourth century. The second factor is that much of our present knowledge of the rural settlement pattern and hierarchy comes from surveys. Aerial survey of its nature will not yield datable material; field survey will, but smaller sites such as the noted '*gisements de faible superficie*' or '*fermes*', even '*petites villas*' yield little in

the way of pottery, let alone glass, and the general paucity of late fifth- and sixth-century types makes it aleatory as to whether any of this material will be present, perhaps especially glass. Such evidence as we have comes almost exclusively from the great villas, but often as re-assessments of earlier excavations. This is hardly surprising given the traditional concentration on these sites, but it does mean that we currently have very little sense of what was happening elsewhere in the settlement hierarchy. The evidence from the large villas has been interpreted as showing that such establishments did not outlive the fifth century, at least not as extensive complexes with the architectural and decorative sophistication that had marked them out a century earlier (cf Balmelle 2001, 117–123). There is some evidence for (re-) construction and embellishment at some sites such as Séviac, largely on the basis of stylistic dating of mosaics (Balmelle 2001, 117), but little that can be dated much after 500. We have minimal clear evidence for the final abandonment of the villas of Novempopulana but this does not suggest any violent destruction such as being consumed by fire, as was claimed for Montmaurin (Fouet 1969, 92, 311), where, instead, the traces of burning on floors likely results from the lighting of small fires in the former grand complex, indicative more of late and ephemeral post-villa uses, perhaps to be termed '*squatterisation*' – a phenomenon detectable at some other sites too, including Séviac (Balmelle 2001, 119–200; Lapart 2006, 365–366).

The significance of this apparent horizon of abandonment can only be partially grasped in the present state of knowledge. If the major villas were, as argued above, expressions of a very particular aristocratic culture and representation of status and wealth, then their value as vehicles for such statements seem to have ended as part of wider trends in the fifth and sixth centuries. The elites of sixth-century Novempopulana, whatever their ethnicity, probably wished to display themselves more as warriors than a mandarin class. What this meant for villas, or rather the lands which had supported them in economic terms and in terms of ownership, is far more difficult to grasp. Potentially villa estates remained units of property, though the provisions of the Law Code of King Euric in 506 would seem to envisage a world where property was increasingly divided and alienated, suggestive of a period of dynamic change in the organisation of property, with the scale and economic yield of landholdings fragmenting. This might have been intensified after 507 with the dispossession of the Visigothic nobility in the aftermath of Vouillé, as the region was divided between the appanages of members of the Frankish royal house; for the first time in 200 years the region became more peripheral rather than bound into the central concerns of imperial or royal power. As yet the sixth century does remain a 'dark age' for the recognition and dating of settlements, though burial sites of the period are

increasingly being excavated. There is, though, one possible conduit linking Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages in the region: the Church.

Continuity, Christianisation or Discontinuity

The fate of villas in Novempopulana and the society that they represented has long been bound up with their role in the spread of Christianity and equally Christianity's role in perpetuating such sites. This is due to three features of the archaeology: evidence for Christian practice at sites; the construction of medieval churches on or near villa sites; and the use of former villa buildings or sites for burial.

Christianity had gained sufficient hold in Novempopulana by the late fourth century that bishop Priscillian of Ávila, though declared a heretic, found a warm welcome in Éauze (Sulpicius Severus, *Chronicon* II,48, 2). By the fifth century an episcopal hierarchy is evident in the region, though relations between the Arian kings of the Goths and the Catholic bishops were sometimes strained. In the same year that King Euric promulgated his Law Code (AD 506), the Church of the Visigothic Kingdom also held its first Council, at Agde on the Mediterranean coast. Thereafter bishops from what had been Novempopulana were regular attenders at Church Councils, with a provincial Council held at Éauze in 551. The Church became, of course, a major landowner with estates being transferred or willed to it. Not unreasonably this has been seen as a route by which estates originating in the fourth and fifth centuries or earlier might still be recognisable in later documentation. For Novempopulana the foremost documentary source is the 'Charter of Nizezius', dated to 680 and recording the donation of estates by a local notable Nizezius (Nicetius?) and his wife Hemnitruda to the abbey of Moissac. Though the bulk of the properties lay around the junction of the River Tarn and the Garonne, two are named as *in pago elesano* (*Ginningus*, *Saviniago*), one *in falcidio in pago elesano* (*Malaronta*), that is, in the area of Éauze (*Elusa*). *Ginningus* has tentatively been identified as Jégun (Gers), located to the north-east of Éauze, and *Malaronta* as perhaps the hamlet of Mourède (Gers), south-east of Éauze. *Saviniago* has excited more attention with attempts to equate it with the villa of Séviac. We should note, however, recent strong arguments that the 'Charter of Nizezius' is a Moissac forgery of the turn of the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Boudartchouk *et al.* 2007). Even if the document may have incorporated earlier material for added verisimilitude, this would be dubious warrant for viewing the toponyms around Éauze as a secure basis for identification of particular sites.

In default of good documentary data for the process of acquisition of erstwhile villa estates by the Church, archaeology has been invoked, with Séviac again the type-site (Lapart and Paillet 1991) (Fig. 6.4). Most of this villa's

main residence around its courtyard seems to have been abandoned from the late fifth century, perhaps with traces of slight timber structures evident, but in the south-eastern angle of the courtyard an existing rectangular room with a southern apse was modified by the construction of a balancing northern apse in which was installed a baptismal basin; later, a small extension was made to the room's eastern side, soon replaced by a larger rectangular space with an eastern apse, associated with further chambers. This would seem to denote a small Christian congregational building with provision for baptism. To its east a church/oratory was constructed, consisting of a rectangular nave with chancel; this became a focus for burial, which in due course expanded over the now-abandoned baptismal complex. The dating for the overall sequence is difficult: the baptismal complex probably dates to the early part of the sixth century, while the church/oratory continued in use down into the late seventh or eighth century (and it is worth noting that there was no medieval successor to it).

Séviac affords a seductive sequence: in the place of the great late Roman villa there arose a smaller Christian ensemble and community, seemingly bridging the gap between antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Such a scheme could encompass the conversion of the aristocracy and then the peasantry to Christianity, the physical perpetuation of the villa site by being 'fixed' as a Christian site and perhaps the transformation of a late Roman estate into an early medieval landholding, be it aristocratic or something more communal (Lewit 2004 for the former; Bowes and Gutteridge 2005 for the latter), possibly in due course transferred to the Church. Seductive it may be, but it is risky to erect this into a model of a general process. A couple of sites just outside Novempopulana, Lamarque, Castetculier (Lot-et-Garonne) and Moncrabeau-Baptiste (Lot-et-Garonne), may show a similar sequence to Séviac (Jacques 2006, 79–92), as may one in the south-west of the province, Taron (Pyrénées-Atlantiques), where a medieval church still stands over part of an extensive late Roman villa (Colin 2008, 171–177), but the sequence *cannot* be observed at the great majority of known villas.

The burial-ground associated with the places of Christian worship at Séviac play into a phenomenon more widely attested in the region, and indeed more generally across the lands of the Western Roman Empire, namely the re-use of Roman-period buildings for burial and its possible significance/s. Regionally, a classic case comes at the villa at La Turraque, Beaucaire-sur-Baïse (Gers) between Auch and Éauze, where a cemetery was installed in a former villa building; several of its burials contained grave-goods of northern 'Frankish' types (Lapart and Petit 1993, 311–313). In the Garonne valley the vast villa at Valentine was succeeded by a cemetery of early medieval date implanted around a (probably Roman) mausoleum to the south-west of the villa (Arnesp), which eventually developed into a small

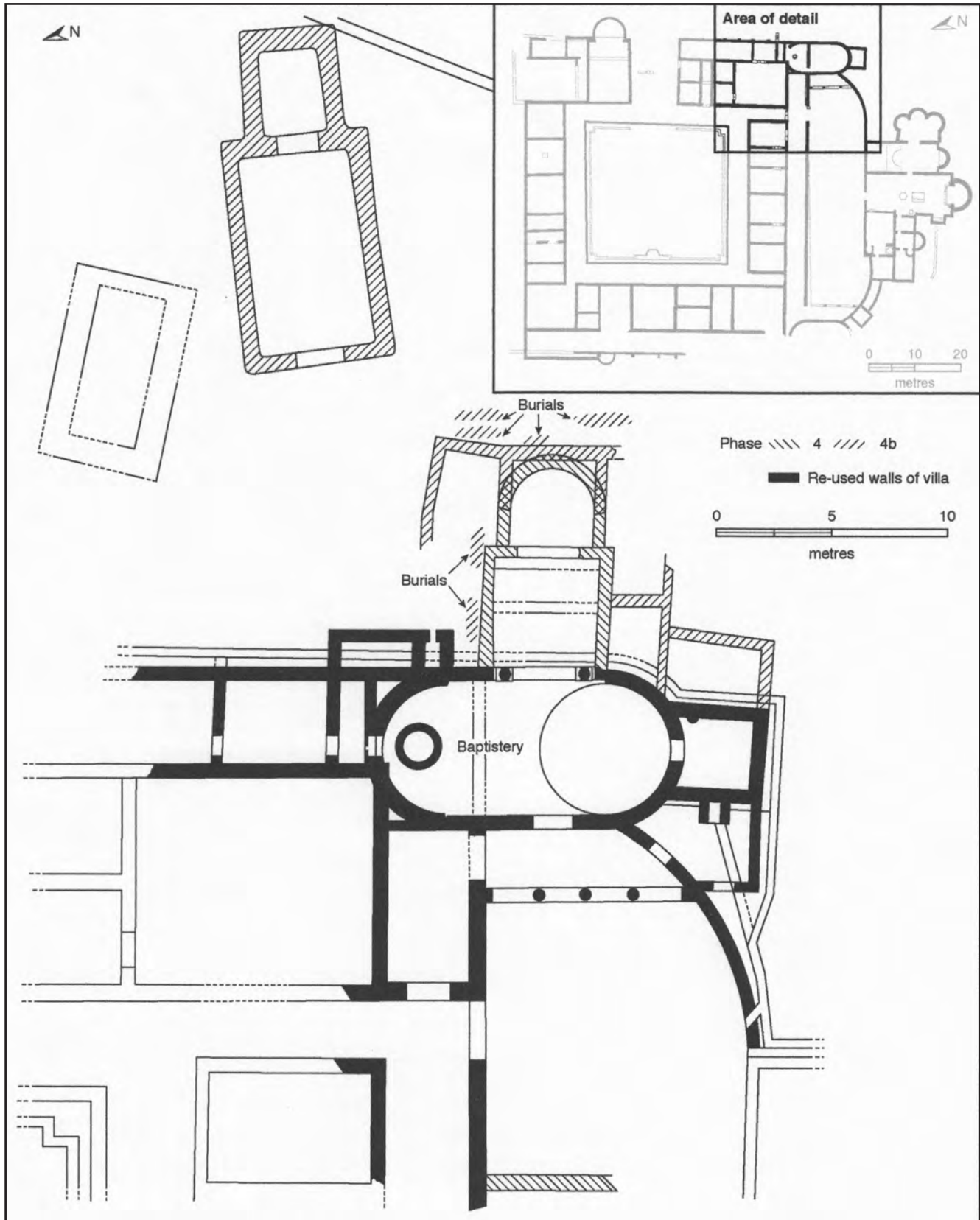


Figure 6.4 Séviac villa, plan of later modifications (drawing by H. Buglass)

medieval monastery (Colin 2008, ch. 4.1). The coincidence between early medieval burials, later medieval churches and possible Roman villa sites has been noted elsewhere (Colin 2008, 158–180, pl. xiv), concentrating mainly in the north-eastern part of the region.

The Church as a means of transmission of landholdings and possibly of communities between the fifth and seventh centuries has been perhaps the dominant strand in thinking about the fate of the countryside of what had been Novempopulana, especially given the lack of archaeological or textual evidence from the early sixth century onwards. But it must be recognised that this scenario is based on remarkably few sites. A recent detailed review of all the evidence for Novempopulana from the fourth to the tenth centuries (Colin 2008, chs 7 and 9) has cautioned against simple models of villa-to-church continuity, arguing that a range of possible sequences exists and equally a range of possible scenarios for why later burials or church-buildings might be on or near the sites of what had been villas. Colin also notes (2008, 236–238) that though the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries yield textual and archaeological evidence for Christian places of worship in the countryside, it is not really till the seventh century that the phenomenon of rural churches in the region becomes generalised, but in very different circumstances such as the development of the concept of the *parochia* and its physical expression, the rise of monastic foundations and their dependencies from the later seventh century, or changes in the organisation of burial and increasing ecclesiastical and communal control over burial-grounds. In the light of these later developments it is clear that the fifth and sixth centuries had by no means definitively structured the development of rural Christianity in Novempopulana.

One last comment may be made about the Church and its role in the transmission of late antique culture. The Church was, of course, the repository of scholarship and learning, deriving ultimately from late Roman models. Physically, the architecture, decoration in marble and mosaic, epigraphy, fixtures and fittings of churches derived very directly from the aristocratic building culture of the late Roman period. For a region such as Novempopulana one could argue that much of what had been used as a means of secular aristocratic self-representation in the fourth century had, by the sixth century, been displaced into the aristocratic self-representation of bishops (often themselves from noble families). A pleasing illustration of this for our region with which to close this section is a letter from Ruricius, bishop of Limoges in the last quarter of the fifth century, to his brother in Christ Clarus, bishop of Éauze (*Epistulae* II.64, trans. Mathisen 1999, 234–235). In this he thanks Clarus for sourcing some columns for him (which he wants stored over winter till they can be collected) and asking for ten more of a smaller size ‘*si inveniri possunt*’ (‘if they can be found’). At what sort of site might the good Elusate bishop have found

such columns available at that date? Do we here have very direct recycling of fourth-century prestige villa architectural remains into sixth-century prestige church architecture?

Concluding Remarks

This last remark shows how study of the rural archaeology of Novempopulana in the late antique period has returned time and again to the great prestige villas. But it should by now be clear that the dominance of these sites in the study of this subject is being broken and emphasis finally turning towards other aspects of the settlement hierarchy. This has revealed a much more animated landscape than one simply parcelled up between domanial estates. A great deal remains to be done to understand the inter-relationship of different types of site in the working of these landscapes; and a great deal also needs to be done on basic topics of rural archaeology such as what crops were grown, what animals raised and where or how the landscape was organised. Dating all this remains a major task, especially for the fifth and sixth centuries, but at least artefactual sequences for these centuries are being established. But Novempopulana nevertheless contains important information for our understanding of the late Roman and early medieval worlds and it was clearly distinctive in Gaul as a whole. In periods such as the fourth century when it was an economically and socially important part of the wider Western Empire, or the fifth century when it formed the heartland of the nascent Visigothic Kingdom, its importance is evident in the archaeology. It is perhaps no coincidence that it is with the region’s political and economic marginalisation under the Franks that its rural archaeology becomes so fugitive. This would have been accentuated by the increasing evidence from textual sources for growing instability and violence from the later sixth century onwards (Rouche 1979).

Notes

- 1 It should be noted that contemporary sources referred to them simply as *Gothi*, Goths; the later appellation Visigoths is used here because of its familiarity.
- 2 ‘I till twice a hundred *iugera*, the vine is cultivated on a hundred *iugera*, meadows on half that, woodland over twice more than the meadows and vines and crops.’

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Rural Settlements in the Territory of Salamanca (Spain) between the Late Roman Period and the Early Middle Ages: Testing a Model

Enrique Ariño

Introduction

Over the last two decades the level and quality of archaeological information related to the late Roman and early medieval periods in the Iberian Peninsula have notably increased. However, rural habitats across this complex timeframe can be enormously challenging: scattered farmsteads, peasant villages formed by groupings of small timber huts and burial areas, stone-built farms, isolated rock-cut graves, fortified villages – some newly created, others as pre-Roman (or Roman) hilltop sites with an occupation that extends to the Early Middle Ages – and churches (and some monasteries) scattered within the rural landscape.

As a key consequence of the new data being generated, a significant number of studies have been published offering (sometimes diverse) readings or interpretations of the post-classical rural archaeological record in the Peninsula (e.g. López Quiroga 2006, 2009; Quirós and Vigil-Escalera 2006; Vigil-Escalera 2007, 2009; Quirós 2009; Martín Viso 2012). While I have recently published my own views about this subject (Ariño 2013), the vitality of the debate is such that new contributions are already prompting different or enhanced interpretations or disputes. Notable are the articles by Chavarría (2012), Fernández (2013) and Arce (2015) on how to read the transformed rural landscapes and relationships to cities; equally useful is Diarte-Blasco's analysis (2016) of rural settlement change from the first barbarian takeovers to the Islamic conquest, considering regional variations in the archaeological record. Mention must also be made of the monograph by Vigil-Escalera (2015) which, although restricted to the fifth century and focused on the inner peninsular regions, provides extensive assessment of relevant sites.

A striking feature of all these contributions is that, while there is a high level of agreement in terms of the *description* of the archaeological record (with the predictable caveats on

the chronology of the settlements and the ceramic repertoire that accompanies them), the *interpretations* generated are often significantly different and incompatible, to the extent that they present a human and social landscape of the rural spaces of the Hispanic Early Middle Ages with irreconcilable readings. Thus, Quirós and Vigil-Escalera (Quirós and Vigil-Escalera 2006; Vigil-Escalera 2007, 2009; Quirós 2009), for example, have analysed the traits that characterise the period and postulate the emergence of village networks from almost the same moment when the late Roman aristocratic villa system collapsed – at least from the middle of the fifth century – with peasant populations with a high level of organisation and autonomy. In their initial studies, these peasant settlements, featuring timber huts and sunken-featured buildings, are viewed as the seeds of the medieval village and the first multi-family habitat points, with diversified productive structures. The presence of associated burial grounds is meanwhile seen as proof of the collective consciousness of these communities and their roots in the landscape. In later studies, the evidence of the widespread collapse experienced by these villages – to use the terminology of these authors – in the first decades of the eighth century has seen these settlements as a vital but ultimately failed experiment, but ones that would have witnessed a restructuring phase from the ninth century (Vigil-Escalera and Quirós 2013, 396–399; Vigil-Escalera 2015, 31). According to this interpretation, after a hiatus in the formative process (a hiatus still unsolved), the Iberian post-classical rural model would already contain the elements that characterise the medieval countryside, notably the peasant village. The fortified hilltop sites, the other significant feature of the countryside from early fifth century onwards, are consequently considered as the 'first-generation castles' (e.g. Quirós 2012, 2013; Vigil-Escalera 2015, 232).

By contrast, Martín Viso (2012), in his reading of the new models of habitats that emerge from the early decades of the fifth century, views these same peasant communities as having less importance in terms of both autonomy and levels of internal organisation; he proposes that the aristocracies in fact exercised some control over these peasant populations. In his opinion, the post-villa habitats show important regional differences. In particular, he sees processes of colonisation and experimentation with new forms of occupation in areas in which there was no Roman habitat of reference. The fortified hilltop sites – traced in different parts of the Hispanic territory – are seen as ‘central places’, marking new power spaces, being noticeably located in peripheral areas in relation to the old Roman urban network (Martín Viso 2006). However, these central places did not influence the creation of the network of medieval habitats given their disappearance or ‘collapse’ in the earliest Islamic period (Martín Viso 2014a, 2016). Elsewhere he has analysed Suevic- and Visigothic-period necropoleis with their rock-cut graves in the central peninsula area and seen these as evidence of peasant populations settled in spaces away from power-points, exploiting mountainous areas and pastures (Martín Viso 2014b, 2014c).

For the Hispanic north-west, López Quiroga (2004) has emphasised the continuity of settlements throughout our study period, stating that the pre-Roman and Roman-period hillforts (*castros* in the Spanish terminology) are the element in the landscape that an emergent community took as its reference point, and highlighting the presence of churches in these *castros* as agents of attraction and of moulding an identity; such can also be viewed as the genesis of medieval parishes. Elsewhere, López Quiroga (2006, 2009) places special emphasis on the varied morphology of the rural habitats, linking the Spanish archaeological record with that of other regions of Western Europe. He claims a certain level of continuity between the late Roman villas and these new habitat models, with barbarian and native populations sharing the same habitat spaces, regardless of the structural differences that these settlement systems present. He too argues that the post-classical habitat model collapses in the eighth century; the medieval villages of the eleventh–twelfth centuries would not be a continuation of the earlier network of settlements since the latter all became depopulated.

Chavarría (2012) has been very critical of the interpretation of villages developing from around the mid-fifth century as being the material record of free peasant communities and the forerunners of the medieval village, this image being incompatible with the political and military history of the convulsed fifth century. She argues that the archaeological record only proves that aristocracies did not reside in these settlements, and instead were in urban spaces; nonetheless, the fortified hilltop sites cannot be interpreted as being other than centres of power and dependent on or connected with the new elites and monarchies that governed the peninsula after the collapse of Roman imperial power.

In similar fashion, I have raised the problem of interpreting peasant settlements that appear in the first decades of the fifth century as true ‘villages’, highlighting their dependence on the late Roman villas and stating how these settlements might have actually been promoted and controlled by a landed aristocracy who no longer resided in that property but who continued to exercise control of and over the *fundus*, even if the latter had been altered, especially in terms of size (Ariño 2013). Furthermore, we should anticipate that some of the aristocracies controlling the *fundus* were not necessarily the same as the great elite families of the fourth century and that some/a part of the large estates could have passed into the hands of Visigothic or Suevic elites. In a parallel phenomenon, as the sites of the villas were transformed into spaces for peasant housing and/or burial, new fortified settlements developed that would feature populations exhibiting discrete but significant markers of status, thereby identifying some of the inhabitants as an aristocracy of lower rank, though connected with the networks of power. According to this interpretation, the polymorphic habitat that defines the long period between c. AD 400–430 and c. 700–720 (with a fifth century in which different powers struggled for control of the peninsula) specifically results from the dynamics of the two stable monarchies: the Suevic, until its definitive demise in 585, and especially the Visigothic, from the moment it gained control of the Hispanic lands until the Arab invasion of 711.

Certain aspects of this interpretation, and Chavarría’s (2012), have been disputed by Arce (2015, 215–216), who especially questions the fact that the peasant habitats installed on the decayed villas were in any way dependent on a relocated great owner. He also argues that the term *uillula* is not applicable to a decayed villa site, which had lost its function as an aristocratic residence but which had a dependent population; rather, he sees *uillula* designating smaller buildings lacking the monumentality of the classical villa of the late Roman period. This possibility needs to be considered. A re-examination of the documents by Isla (2001) allows us to verify that the term *uillula* appears mainly in historical contexts which, as we will see, document the existence of rural habitats that, though modest, are constructed in stone.

Given that my own most recent relevant study (2013) includes an interpretation of the Hispanic archaeological record for the period c. AD 400–800, those arguments will not be repeated here, nor will I respond direct to counterviews by others since. Instead, here I want to move from the general to the specific, testing the model proposed in 2013 with data gathered since the 1990s in our fieldwork in the *ager Salmanticensis*, which has generated a detailed archaeological and historical image of the territory of the city of Salamanca. This site originated in pre-Roman times, continued in the Roman period and was of some significance in the Suevic and Visigothic periods, survived

the vicissitudes of the early medieval period and in time became one of the power centres of the Kingdom of León in its advance south of the line of the River Duero.

Field Data

Salamanca lies on the right bank of the Tormes River, a tributary of the Douro, on the northern sub-plateau of the Iberian Peninsula. The city is mentioned in the classical sources with the name of *Helmantiké* (Polybius, *Histories*, 3.14.1), *Hermandica* (Livy, *History of Rome*, 21.5.6), *Salmatiké* (Plutarch, *Bravery of Women*, 248E–249B) or *Salmatida* (Polyaenus, *Stratagems*, 7.48), but all these mentions refer to events connected with the campaigns of Hannibal. The most significant reference to Salamanca in the Roman imperial period is provided by the surveyor Frontinus (*De Agrorum Qualitate*, Th. 1–2), who used *Salmatica* to exemplify the *ager per extremitatem mensura comprehensus*, the system of land organisation characteristic of the tributary (*stipendiariae*) cities. Salamanca also appears as a stopping-place (*mansio*) on the road between *Augusta Emerita* (Merida) and *Asturica Augusta* (Astorga) (*Antonine Itinerary*, 434.4; *Ravenna Cosmography*, IV.45–319.7). The Episcopal Council of Merida of the year 666 registers a dispute related to the borders between the dioceses of Idanha and *Salmantica* (*Conc. Emer.*, ch. 8; cf Díaz 2011, 122–123, see below). Little is known about Salamanca during the period of Islamic occupation and until the site's first re-population carried out by the King of Leon, Ramiro II (939–949) (Barrios 1985). However, archaeological remains support the occupation of the city from ancient times to today (Núñez Hernández and Curchin 2007, 554–563).

Research into the rural settlement structures from the late Iron Age to the Early Middle Ages in the territory of Salamanca began in 1992. The first stage (1992–1996) consisted of an intensive survey in the central area of the local region of La Armuña; the survey included aerial photography, pollen analyses and study of the medieval documentation. Next, between 1996 and 2002, extensive surveys were carried out in the immediate environs of the city in order to compare information obtained from the La Armuña survey to data at the regional level. In addition, a programme of surveys and excavations was carried out in the southern area of the hinterland of Salamanca (La Sierra). The third stage started in 2001 and comprised study of the ceramic material found in excavations at a set of six sites, which presented a good stratigraphic record covering the period from the end of the fourth century to the early eighth century AD. These analyses helped to establish precise chronologies for pottery production, allowing for the differentiation of internal sequences in the periods following Roman occupation. Furthermore, a review of a set of sites located in the Tormes Valley was



Figure 7.1 Archaeological research in the *ager Salmanticensis*: 1. Intensive survey of La Armuña (1992–1996), 2. Extensive survey around the city (1996–2002), 3. Extensive survey of La Sierra (1996–2002), 4. Extensive survey of the middle Tormes Valley (2008–2011), 5. The Roman villa at Saelices el Chico, 6. Peñas de Santa Cruz, 7. Monte el Alcaide, 8. Dehesa del Castillo, 9. Lancha del Trigo

undertaken since these had provided unique and different archaeological contexts, characterised especially by the presence of stamped pottery and the so-called ‘Visigothic slates’ (discussed below). Finally, between 2008 and 2012, our research revisited La Armuña to sample ten selected sites using the data obtained from the ceramic studies to refine and re-define their characteristics and chronology (Fig. 7.1). Below different facets and ‘layers’ of the sequence revealed from these surveys are discussed and their relevance for wider debates on post-classical rural change highlighted.

Rural Landscapes at Salamanca between the Late Fourth and the Early Eighth Century: An Interpretation

(1) First Layer: Roman Villas and Other Rural Settlement in the *Ager Salmanticensis* in the Fourth Century

In this late Roman phase, the villa was the dominant residential model in the landscape in the territory of Salamanca, but with an uneven geographical distribution: they were prevalent in the area around the city, but very scarce in La Sierra and unknown or unclear in the middle Tormes Valley.

The intensive survey of La Armuña (see Ariño, Riera and Rodríguez Hernández 2002; Ariño and Rodríguez Hernández 1997) indicated a model of settlement centred on villas, whose roots probably lie in the Flavian period. The villa form consisted of a monumental or residential part (e.g. the sites of Aldealama, Prado de Abajo and probably La

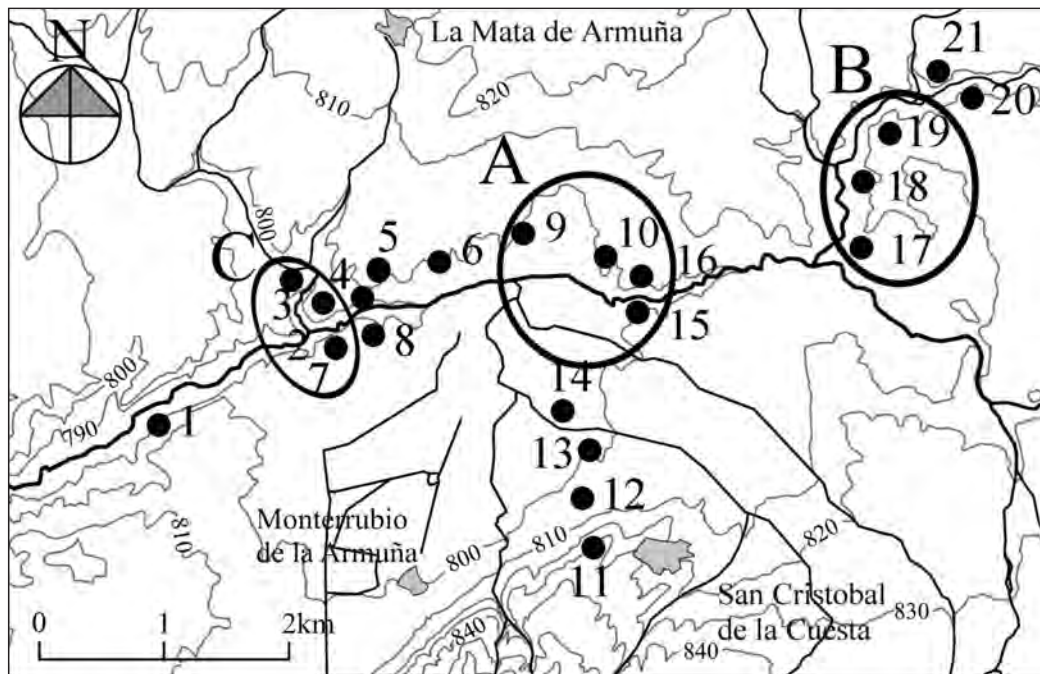


Figure 7.2 Map of the intensive survey of La Armuña with the locations of sites of the Roman and Visigothic periods: A. Villa of Aldealama (9) with its dependent subordinate areas: Aldealama S (10), Las Encerradas (15) and Las Canteras (16). B. Villa of Prado de Abajo (19) with its dependent subordinate areas: Pedraza (17) and Los Melgares (18). C. Settlement of La Recorva (2) with its dependent subordinate areas: Mozodiel N-1 (3) and Mozodiel E-1 (7). The other sites belong to the Visigothic period

Recorva) around which spaces for functional or productive activities were arranged. However, the first phase remains unclear because of the scant presence of early imperial period wares in the surface ceramic contexts. Judging from the type of architectural structures traced and mapped through aerial photography and geophysical prospection – in addition to data derived from our field surveys – the sequence best represented corresponds to the late Roman period, with monumental aristocratic villas (Ariño *et al.* 2015) (Fig. 7.2).

This model can also be proposed for the immediate environs of Salamanca. An early Roman occupation is present in a total of 25 rural sites, to which can perhaps be added another six. The related finds (notably Italic, Gaulish and early Hispanic terra sigillata) are at a low level, however, making it difficult to interpret the occupation model of this phase. The organisation of the urban territories in northern Lusitania at the time of Augustus (Frontinus, *De Agrorum Qualitate*, Th. 1–2; Behrends *et al.* 1998; Hinrichs 1974, 114–115) seems not to have been accompanied by a process of land colonisation, although it was probably the framework for the occupation established in later phases. When this process appears, in the latter part of the first century AD, the settlements were established on a Roman model, based on villa-farms, ignoring the pre-Roman settlement system based in fortified hillforts (*castros*).

Noticeably, most of these early Roman sites continue into the late Roman period, although there are some exceptions.

A total of 33 sites (plus another six ‘possibles’) feature an occupation sequence extending to the third and fourth centuries. The predominance of late Roman wares in the surface samples should reflect the aristocratic occupation typical of the late Roman period. The qualitative indicators recovered, such as fragments of mosaics, pieces of painted walls and hypocaust bricks, as well as the plan forms traced in aerial photographs, allow us to identify a total of 11 possible late Roman villas. Support comes from excavation as the sites of Prado de Abajo/Los Melgares, San Pelayo, La Vega and San Julián de la Valmuza (Fig. 7.3).

By contrast, the late Roman sequence is less well defined in the middle valley of the River Tormes, with only six sites likely to belong to this phase (La Dehesa de la Torrecilla I, El Bañadero, Los Casetones II, Anguas I, Las Casas del Medrano/Prado de la Nava and La Dehesa de la Torrecilla II) (Fig. 7.4). The surface sampling at these recovered materials characterised by an association of late Hispanic terra sigillata and Roman tile. Nevertheless, we cannot exclude that all these sites might in fact belong to the next period, dating from the first decades of the fifth century. The type of occupation at these sites remains unknown except in the case of La Dehesa de la Torrecilla II, where excavations uncovered a kiln (Ariño 2011; Benet and García Figuerola 1989). In any case, the relationship of this generation of settlements with older villas in the area of the middle Tormes Valley is not clear. It is worth noting difficulties in terms of field data collection, however, since most sites have been

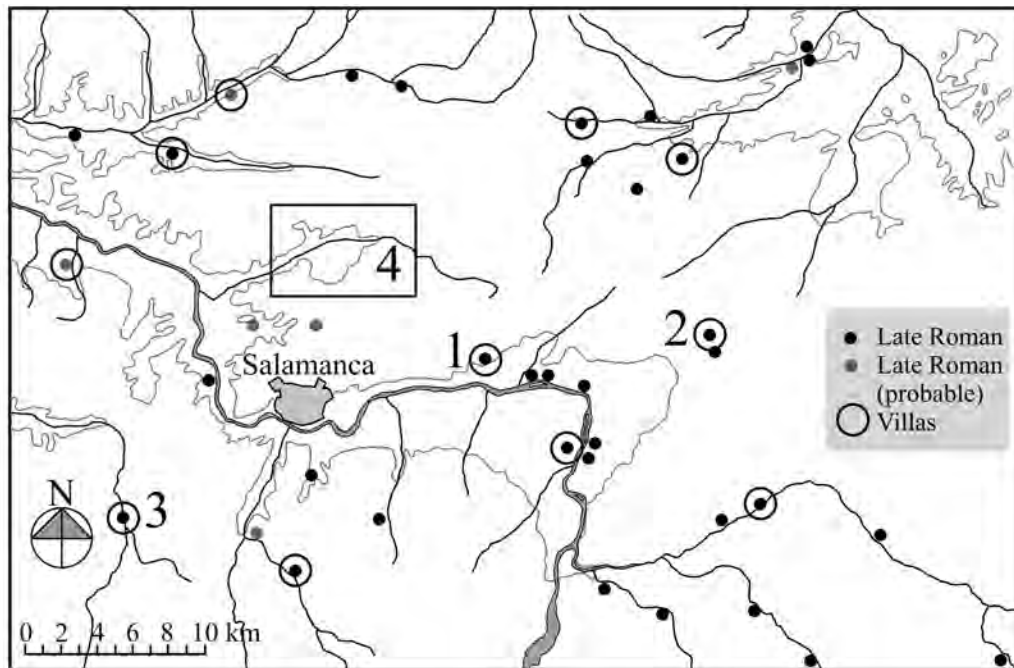


Figure 7.3 Map of the territory of Salamanca with the settlements in late Roman times. Sites from the intensive survey of La Armuña shown in Fig. 7.1 are omitted. Other sites mentioned in the text: 1. San Pelayo, 2. La Vega, 3. San Julián de la Valmuza, 4. Intensive survey of La Armuña

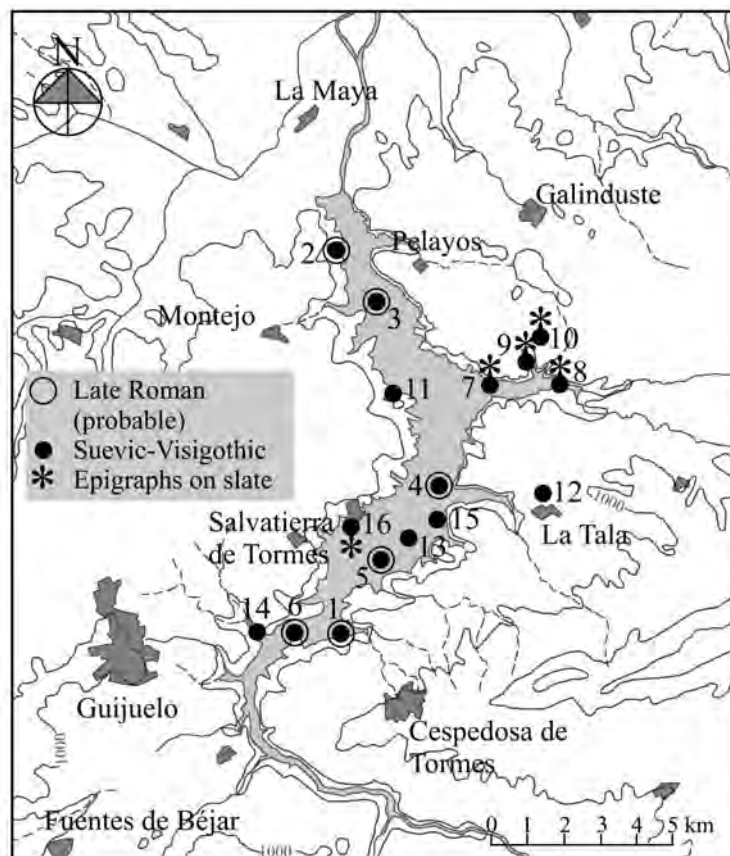


Figure 7.4 Settlements identified in the middle valley of the Tormes River: 1. La Dehesa de la Torrecilla I, 2. El Bañadero, 3. Los Casetones II, 4. Anguas I, 5. Las Casas del Medrano/Prado de la Nava, 6. La Dehesa de la Torrecilla II, 7. El Cuarto de En medio, 8. El Canal de las Hoyas, 9. El Cuarto del Remoludo, 10. El Colmenar, 11. Prado Morán, 12. Los Muladares, 13. Prado de los Hoyos, 14. Los Molinos, 15. Regato Calderón, 16. El Cortinal de San Juan

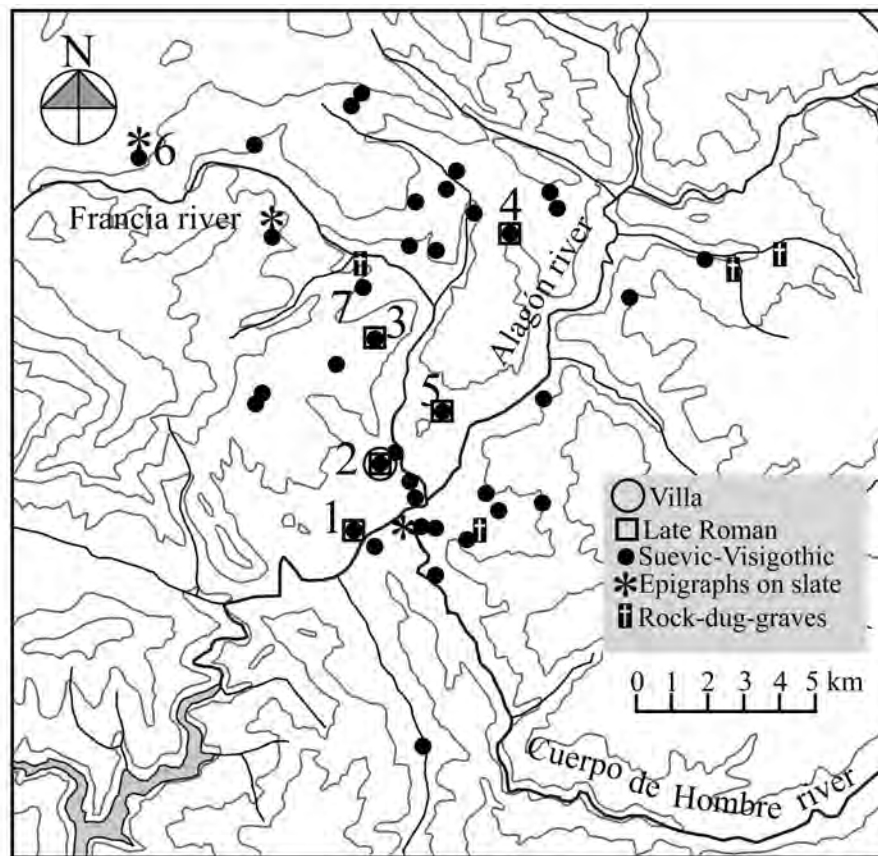


Figure 7.5 Settlements identified in La Sierra and mentioned in the text: 1. El Manto, 2. La Viña de la Iglesia, 3. La Peral, 4. Los Alagones, 5. Fuente de los Frailes, 6. La Legoriza, 7. El Cuquero

affected by the presence of the reservoir of Santa Teresa – built in the 1960s – which occasionally renders many areas inaccessible to surveys (Fig. 7.4).

In La Sierra region, a late Roman sequence is confirmed only in three sites (El Manto, La Viña de la Iglesia and La Peral) (Ariño, Barbero and Díaz 2005) but two other possibles (Los Alagones and Fuente de los Frailes) (Fig. 7.5). Excavations carried out in La Viña de la Iglesia identified a Roman villa originating in the early Roman period which endured perhaps until the late fourth century or the earliest fifth (Dahí 2012, 75–105).

The best known example of a late Roman high status villa in the territory analysed is Saelices el Chico, which probably belonged to *Mirobriga*, an urban site located on the fringes of the Salamanca *territorium*, but whose exact location is controversial (Martín Viso 2014a, 255). The villa lies outside our surveyed areas but is significant because of the sizeable excavations here which have revealed different sectors of the complex: its first phase featured thermal baths that probably date to the second century; in the fourth century the villa saw major renewal and a new space with several rooms paved with mosaics organised around a peristyle was erected. The complex includes a large room, probably a *triclinium*, with a

mosaic depicting the myth of Bellerophon and the Chimera (Dahí 2012, 143–221) (Fig. 7.6).

(2) Second layer: Decayed villas and new rural settlements in the early fifth century

A transformation of the model of rural habitat can be observed in the first decades of the fifth century. The sites of the late Roman villas continued to be occupied but all the evidence suggests that the aristocratic residences had been replaced by a new, much more functional occupation model. In the immediate surroundings of Salamanca, this change has been traced in excavated sites like La Vega, San Julián de la Valmuza, San Pelayo and Prado de Abajo/Los Melgares (Ariño, Dahí and Sánchez 2012; Dahí 2012, 45–74, 115–130). The same phenomenon occurs in the peripheral areas of La Sierra (as at La Viña de la Iglesia) and in the south-western area of the study zone (e.g. Saelices el Chico) (Dahí 2012, 75–105, 143–221). By this phase, in all of these well known cases, the villa as an elite residence had given way to different activities, including burials and craft workshops (e.g. at San Julián de la Valmuza – see García Morales and Serrano Piedecabras 1996), peasant habitats with craft spaces and kilns (e.g. Prado de Abajo/Los Melgares

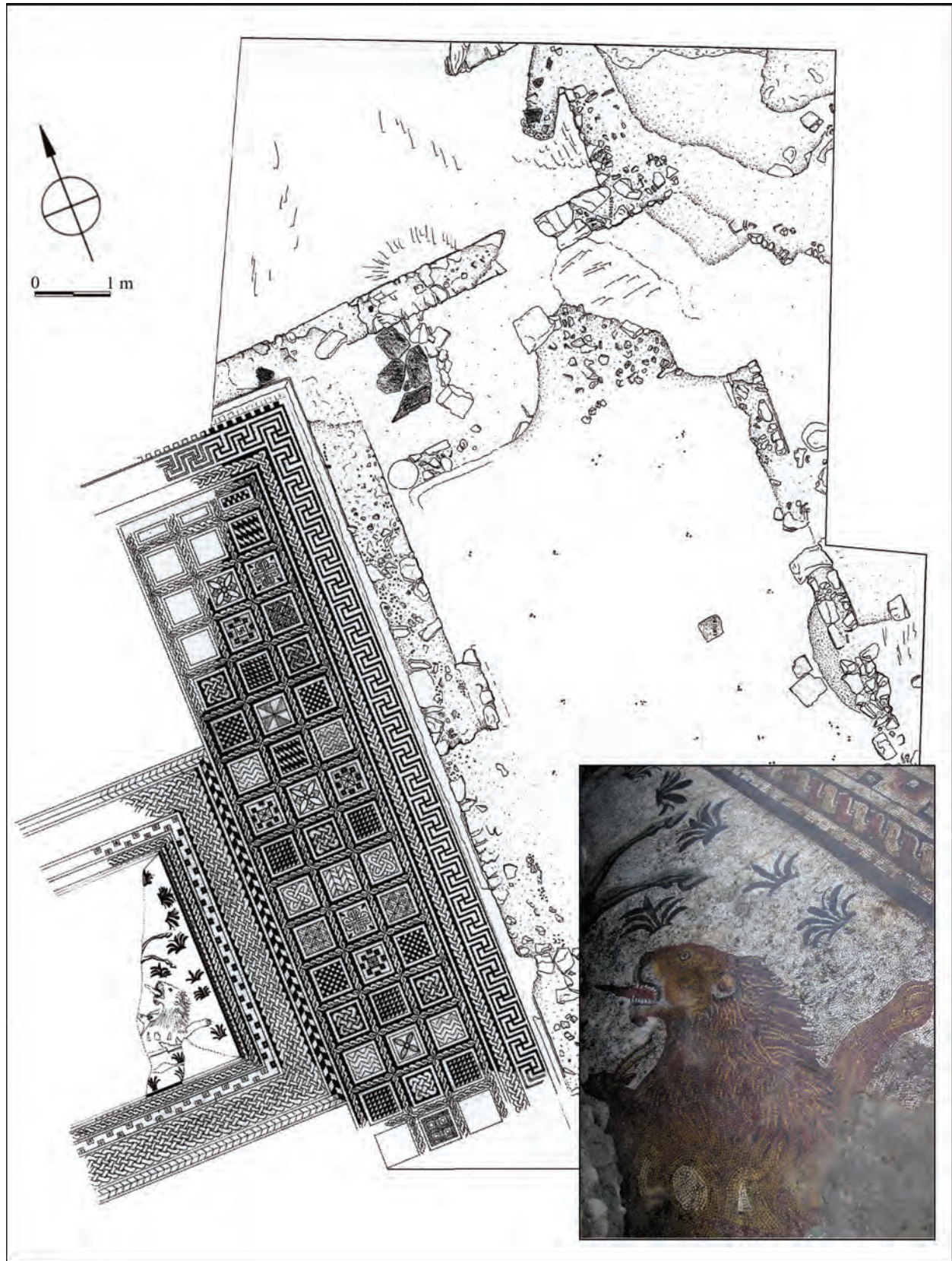


Figure 7.6 Roman villa of Saelices el Chico. Plan of the room paved with the mosaic of Bellerophon and the Chimera (late fourth-century)
 (Image composed by the author based on plan of Adobe – Gestión de Patrimonio Histórico; photograph: C. Martín Chamoso)

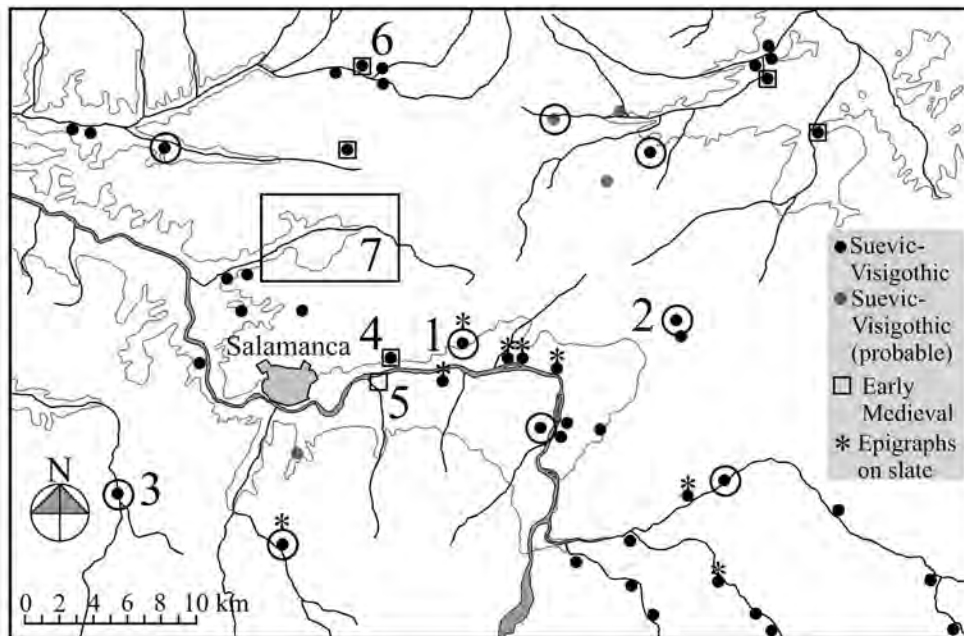


Figure 7.7 Map of the territory of Salamanca with settlements dated to the Suevic and Visigothic periods and the Early Middle Ages. The sites from the intensive survey of La Armuña shown in Fig. 7.1 are omitted. Other sites mentioned in the text: 1. San Pelayo, 2. La Vega, 3. San Julián de la Valmuza, 4. El Castillo de Ribas, 5. Casas Viejas, 6. Torreperales, 7. Intensive survey of La Armuña

and Saelices el Chico – see Dahí 2012, 115–130, 143–221) or, simply, spoliation (e.g. San Pelayo and Prado de Abajo) and perhaps periodic ‘squatter’ occupation (as claimed for La Viña de la Iglesia) (Dahí 2012, 45–74, 115–130, 75–105).

At the same time that these old villas fell away, so we also see the appearance of a set of new settlements in the landscape. This phenomenon was well documented in the intensive survey in La Armuña where 11 sites show occupation from the period of the Germanic kingdoms on as a single sequence (Ariño, Riera and Rodríguez Hernández 2002; Ariño and Rodríguez Hernández 1997) (Fig. 7.2). In the territory surrounding Salamanca, where extensive survey was carried out, 15 sites originating in the fifth or sixth century were documented. Surface pottery assemblages at all these sites is comparable and can be defined by the association of late Hispanic *terra sigillata* (in limited quantities but with the significant presence of mould types of this ware), common wares and common cooking wares – the latter being dominant. The ceramic contexts reveal that the degraded occupation of the villa sites as well as the newly created peasant spaces extend to an undetermined date perhaps close to the first decades of the eighth century, though in some cases abandonment may have come earlier (Ariño *et al.* 2015).

The ceramic context for the Suevic and Visigothic period is characterised by a low variation along the whole sequence, but there are two specific wares that provide more precise dates: a common ware grey or black in colour that seemingly appears in the archaeological record in the first decades of the fifth century; and a common cooking ware decorated with burnished lines either on its internal or external faces,

or else on both, which does not appear before the mid-sixth century (Dahí 2012, 224–225). Although both types of ceramic as yet remain very scarce in the archaeological record, they have been recovered in the surface surveys and thus contribute to enhance the occupation sequence. At some sites dated to this period archaeologists have also recovered ‘Visigothic slates’ (discussed below) which form a valuable chronological reference point as these unique documents seem to belong to the span of the late sixth to late seventh centuries (see Martín Viso 2013; Velázquez 2000, 2004). The noted new settlement forms appear in all the surveyed areas, but in the region around the city of Salamanca they can be seen to clearly relate to the surroundings of the decayed Roman villas (Fig. 7.7). The six settlements in the middle valley of the Tormes River with an inconclusive surface ceramic context (noted above) might well belong to this sequence, since in that area and in La Sierra region (Figs 7.4 and 7.5), new settlements likely of this phase have been documented; the scant materials from the surface sampling prevent a precise chronology other than denoting creations from c. 400–450 onwards (Ariño 2011).

(3) Third layer: A Further Model of Peasant Settlement in the Middle Tormes Valley and La Sierra (Late Fifth and Sixth Century)

A further model of peasant settlement emerged from around the sixth century. Currently limited to La Sierra and the middle Tormes Valley, its presence in the areas around Salamanca cannot be excluded. These sites are characterised by small and simple stone-built houses with floors of slab or



Figure 7.8 Houses of La Legoriza (seventh-century)

slate, sometimes with internal divisions, although undivided houses are also frequent. This type of habitat never features large groups of houses and it is also not uncommon for there to be an isolated house only. In two cases, both dated to the seventh century, La Legoriza (Fig. 7.8) and Monte el Alcaide (the latter located outside the surveyed area), rock-cut graves appear interspersed between living spaces. The presence of presses for processing wine or oil is a common feature at these sites, as registered at El Cuquero (in the sixth century) (Ariño *et al.* 2005; Dahí 2012, 107–114), La Legoriza (Gómez Gandullo 2006; Dahí 2012, 131–142) and Monte el Alcaide (Paricio and Vinuesa 2009). However, this same kind of building also appears, at least in one case, over the remains of an aristocratic villa (Saelices el Chico – see Dahí 2012, 161–221).

Besides these new (presumed) peasant spaces, the landscape came to host another new type of settlement. For the first time since the Roman villas lost their aristocratic function, the presence of elites can be detected in the rural landscape. There are arguments to locate one of these centres of power in the middle of the Tormes Valley, in the form of at least one monastic complex in this area from the early or middle sixth century (Ariño 2011). A three-naved church with an associated set of graves was found at the site of El Cuarto de Enmedio (Velázquez 2005, 95) (Fig. 7.9). The site



Figure 7.9 Church of El Cuarto de Enmedio

has also provided two decorated capitals (Barroso and Morín de Pablos 1992, 47–49). While the building can be dated within the Visigothic period, its precise chronology remains unknown. In El Cortinal de San Juan, the other relevant site, excavations carried out by Cerrillo (1976, 1977) detected a first stage of occupation featuring stamped pottery, common cooking ware and a coin belonging to Magnus Maximus (383–388). A significant set of architectural remains

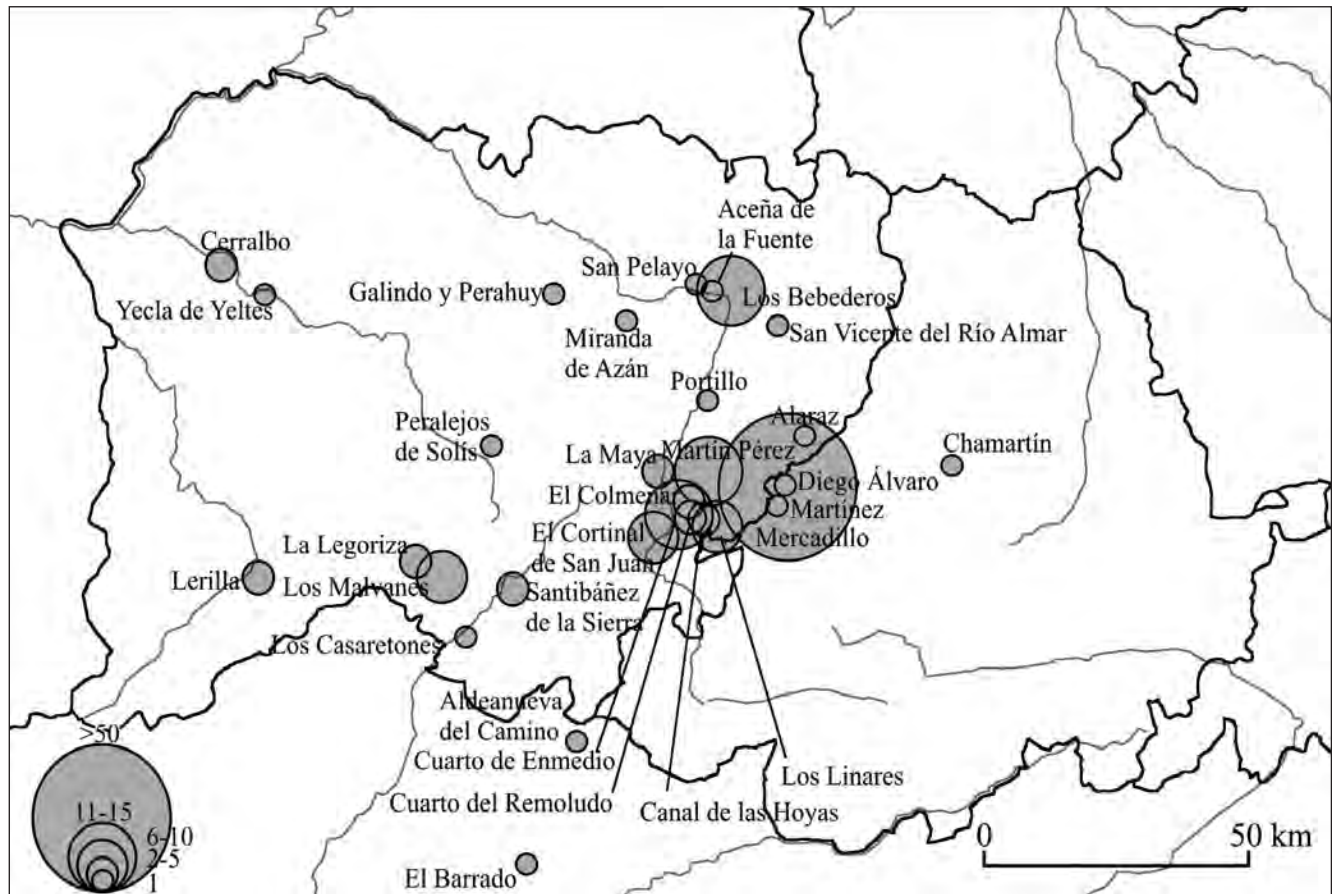


Figure 7.10 Distribution map of the text-carrying 'Visigothic slates', with the number of specimens per site (image produced by the author with data from Velázquez 2004)

(columns, large stone blocks, etc.) was also uncovered. The date of the sequence of occupation of El Cortinal de San Juan depends on the date assigned to the stamped pottery, whose precise chronology remains controversial, but which appears to have been established in the second half of the fifth century (Juan Tovar 2012; Sastre and Catalán 2012; Sastre *et al.* 2014); however, in my opinion, this ceramic type could extend into the early years of the sixth century. In any case, the presence of a Visigothic-period church here seems very likely because of two characteristic decorated architectural fragments – part of a figurative chancel screen and a relief decorated with leaves and flowers, probably a pilaster (Barroso and Morín de Pablos 1992, 58–65).

Lancha del Trigo (municipality of Diego Álvaro) is another significant settlement in the middle valley. Excavations by Gutiérrez Palacios, Díaz and Maluquer (1958) revealed several houses, rectangular in form and stone-built. No accurate chronology could be established given the poor understanding then of the ceramics, which saw minimal reporting anyway in the publication. However, a striking find was the presence of a number of 'Visigothic slates' (*pizarras visigodas*) (Martín Viso 2013). Such finds, plus the architectural structures found at the site, elevate the status of

the habitat in the wider context of the valley. The neighbouring site of Dehesa del Castillo also saw excavation (1945–1946); while the results were never properly published, Martín Viso (2013) has thoroughly reviewed the surviving site data as well as the settlement itself, and interprets Dehesa del Castillo as a small archive associated with an ecclesiastical centre; he suggests that the 'Visigothic slates' should be read, at least in some cases, as evidence of the management of local resources by aristocracies. The contents of these 'Visigothic slates', known from a discrete number of sites, are varied, but include devotions, biblical texts (Psalms and the Apocalypse), writing exercises (alphabets), scholarly mathematical exercises (especially additions), drawings with varied subjects (but often religious), numerical inscriptions and administrative documents.

The geographical distribution of the 'Visigothic slates' points to this area of the middle Tormes Valley as where these documents were in fact generated. The contents of the slates, combined with the presence of churches (certain for El Cuarto de Enmedio and very likely at El Cortinal de San Juan) fit well with the hypothesis of these slates as the type of documents generated by a monastic centre (Ariño 2011) (Fig. 7.10). Some of the numerical slates of El Cortinal de

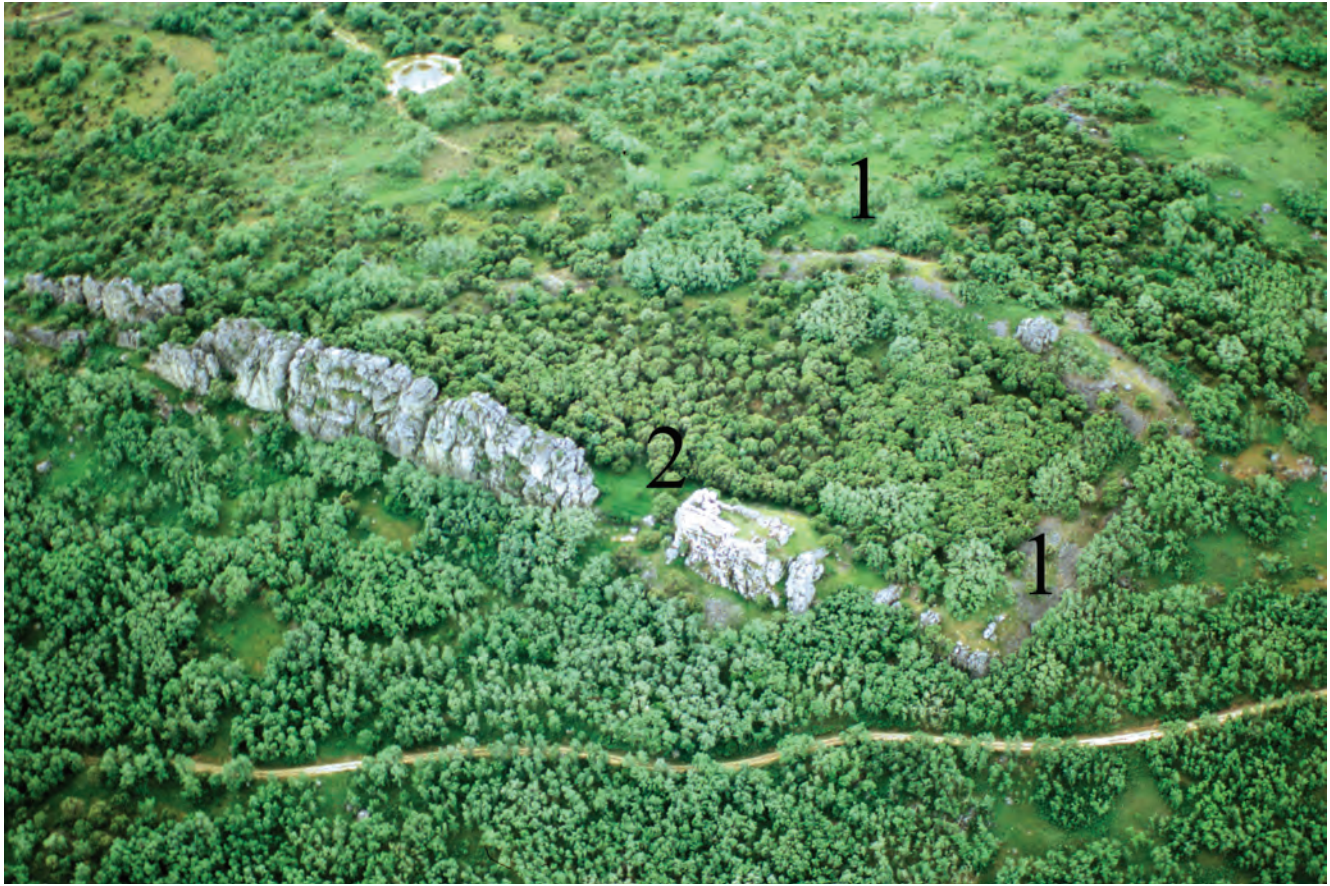


Figure 7.11 Fortified hilltop of Peñas de Santa Cruz (from the north): 1. First wall, probably belonging to the Visigothic period, 2. Islamic tower. Aerial photograph of May 24, 2003

San Juan could, for example, be read as registers for some type of tax or census paid to a large civilian or religious landowner (Díaz and Martín Viso 2011; Martín Viso 2013).

Another significant site in this specific zone is El Cuarto de las Hoyas, set near the noted church of El Cuarto de Enmedio. In El Cuarto de las Hoyas the surveys found a complex that could be read as a peasant village judging by the house units, but which featured stamped pottery (Fabián *et al.* 1986a, 1986b), a ceramic type wholly absent in other settlements of the *ager Salmanticensis*, except for the Cortinal de San Juan; and it is worth noting that this ware appears at both sites in high quantities. Could this uneven distribution of the stamped pottery be the result of the management of some special resources by the elites and a mark of privileged commercial networking?

Slates and churches pinpoint the presence of religious aristocracies in the *ager Salmanticensis*. However military and secular aristocracies are less visible. Potentially, some of the stone buildings that appear in the late fifth or sixth centuries could have hosted aristocratic populations of low or medium rank, such as at the just-noted El Cuarto de las Hoyas. As argued elsewhere, the fortified hilltop settlements, which are a type of habitat characteristic of

the period in diverse parts of the Peninsula, seem a likely choice for the siting of military (or combined military/civilian) aristocracies. However, in the case of the *ager Salmanticensis*, only one probable settlement of this type has been found, namely Peñas de Santa Cruz (in the municipality of Bembibre de la Sierra). Peñas de Santa Cruz is a hilltop, c. 30 km south of Salamanca (Fig. 7.11): it features a 5 m wide wall, built with irregularly shaped stone blocks, and including a reused Roman milestone, probably dedicated to the emperor Maximianus (286–305 and 307–308) or else to Galerius (293–311) (Ariño and Liz 2003). This milestone sets a *post quem* date for the enclosure. Sadly, the surface finds assemblage was very scant, but did include shards of common cooking ware decorated with burnished lines, likely belonging to the second half of the sixth century or later (Dahí 2012, 225).

(4) Fourth Layer: The Ending of a Recently Created System

The early eighth century is marked by a dearth of sites. In all of the study zones a general collapse of the previous settlement forms can be observed. Only in the areas near Salamanca can some still occupied points be detected

(Fig. 7.7), although, admittedly, the pottery datable to this time is minimal. The most remarkable example of continuity occurs at the castle of Peñas de Santa Cruz, where a powerful fortification was added to the pre-existing walls (Fig. 7.11). Based on its setting and the construction characteristics, the building works should be interpreted as an early Islamic castle designed to aid in the surveillance of the city of Salamanca from the south, set in relation to the border line between the Kingdoms of Leon and al-Andalus. In two other cases functions as frontier markers likewise seems clear: the Castillo de Ribas, located on the north bank of the River Tormes, is attested by written sources (the *Chronicon* by Sampirus – see Pérez de Urbel 1952) from as early as AD 939; on the opposite bank of the river, at the site of Casas Viejas, a tower built in lime mortar has been identified, probably related to the defensive line created by al-Andalus. In addition, we can note Torreperales 2, located in the inner part of the territory of Salamanca, where stone blocks and architectural remains – probably also belonging to a tower – are still visible on the surface (Ariño *et al.* 2015).

How the Landscape Changes: Agents

The above study shows the diverse changes that the rural settlements of the *ager Salmanticensis* underwent across the analysed period (Fig. 7.12). The role played by war in these changes cannot be underestimated. Until AD 456, the Suevi had tried to take control of large areas of *Hispania*. They conquered Merida in 440 and, shortly after, took Sevilla. In 452–454 the Suevi were recognised by emperor Valentinian, who assigned them a territory including lands from the mouth of the River Guadalquivir to the Cantabrian Sea. Although defeated by Theodoric in 456, the Suevi retained a kingdom in *Gallaecia* until AD 584, when they were definitively conquered by the Visigothic King Leovigild. From the mid-fifth century to the year in which the Suevic

Kingdom was destroyed, the situation between both these kingdoms could be described as one of tense peace (Díaz 2011, 2015). This situation undoubtedly prompted the rise of some fortified hilltop sites.

Furthermore, there is evidence that the mutual treaties between the monarchies broke up the structure of various urban territories. Thus, at the Council of Merida in AD 666, Sclua, bishop of the church of Idanha, claimed that Iustus, bishop of Salamanca, was still holding part of the territory that should belong to Idanha, even though the diocese of Salamanca had recovered those lands which had been assigned to *Gallaecia* by the former demarcation (*Conc. Emer.*, ch. 8; cf Díaz 2011, 122–123). According to this document, it could be argued that the Church (and the diocesan territories) probably filled, to some extent, the gap caused by the disappearance of the old power within the Roman cities. With the final loss of Roman authority, a new and different structure of territorial organisation emerged. Salamanca probably expanded its area of influence at the expense of the neighbouring cities of *Bletissama* (Ledesma) and *Mirobriga* (located at Ciudad Rodrigo or close by). The emergence of a diverse religious aristocracy which assumed the oversight of new spaces of power in the rural landscape should be seen in this interpretative framework. Monastic centres like those which we believe have been found in the middle of the Tormes Valley would have managed a territory of scattered plots in the same way as an aristocratic Roman villa had.

The civil aristocracy probably played a similar role, but its presence in the rural habitats of the region analysed is much less visible. The great properties which had characterised the late Roman aristocracies were probably much diminished in size, and perhaps also in their yields and profits. According to the archaeological data, a re-armed but

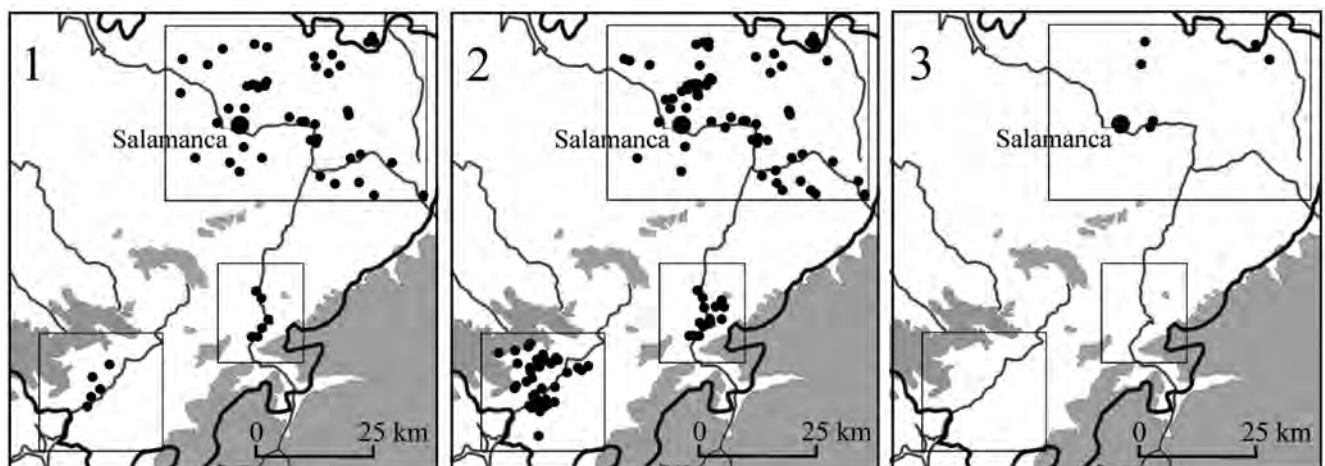


Figure 7.12 Overall evolution of rural settlement in the *ager Salmanticensis*: 1. From the fourth century to the early fifth, 2. From the fifth century to the early eighth, 3. From the early eighth century onwards

less powerful aristocracy could have initiated and occupied the fortified hilltop settlements.

The role played by peasant populations in the emergent settlement structures and modified landscapes also needs to be considered. Some mobility of peasants can be deduced from the increase in the number of new rural sites from the early part of the fifth century. These movements could have been partly prompted (or at least tolerated) by the military authorities which would have tended to use resources (including land) at its convenience, often by the exercise of force. The ‘land rush’ which, based on the archaeological evidence, increased especially in the sixth century and included processes of colonisation of free spaces scattered within the urban territories, should probably be read in this interpretative key. At this time, after the conquest of the Suevic Kingdom, the agents of the Visigothic monarchy were involved in creating a new model of landscape (Fig. 7.12). How it all functioned and communicated, what its economic articulation and social make-up were, are all factors to be questioned further through more detailed archaeological scrutiny across the Peninsula.

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Transformation in the Avon Valley from the Late Fourth to Seventh Centuries AD: A Case Study from the West Midlands, England

Abigail E. I. Tompkins

Introduction

Academic periodisation draws a line through British history in the fifth century AD, which, at best, holds back our understanding and, at worst, leads to false interpretations. This academic divide either side of the Roman withdrawal of troops and administrators in c. AD 410 – ‘Romano-British’ versus ‘early medieval’ – preferences research into new people and new ideas at the expense of the persisting ‘indigenous’ population and their own reactions to the changed socio-economic and political environment they found themselves in.

In 1992, William Green wrote of ‘intellectual straightjackets’ (1992, 13) created by and perpetuating an educational system which was trying to make manageable the swathe of human history. He warned of the dangers of using specific dates to define periods and yet, more than two decades on, British archaeologists and historians don’t just draw a line in the sand at 410, they build a wall worthy of Hadrian himself. Simon Esmonde-Cleary, meanwhile, has stated something that should be fundamental to all studies of the fifth and sixth centuries AD (or, indeed, to all studies of any century), namely that: ‘it might well be easier to describe and understand innovation if we have an understanding of the base-situation out of which it developed’ (2011, 140). Thankfully attitudes are shifting, as evident in a number of recent publications which show the value of research which spans the fourth to sixth centuries in Britain. For example, Collins and Gerrard’s edited volume *Debating Late Antiquity in Britain* (2004) features papers which discuss various themes relating to archaeologies of between AD 300 and 700; these include Gerrard’s own enlightening analysis of the Black Burnished Ware industry in Somerset and Dorset which demonstrates continuity of production into the fifth century. In the Hadrian’s Wall

zone Brian Roberts has emphasised how conditions in the fourth century were fundamental to the later establishment of the kingdom of Northumbria (2010, 120); and David Petts concluded that continuity of activity at forts into the fifth century was likely ‘the rule rather than the exception’ and with former Roman military personnel influential in the establishment of new power groups in these forts and their hinterlands (2013, 320–325; see also Collins, this volume). Despite such advances, Romano-British and early medieval researchers still rarely engage with each other or with each other’s data (Fleming 2012, 3). Workshops and initiatives such as the 2016 Leicester and Rome sessions, therefore, are essential to reinforce and refocus our attention on the Roman legacy beyond 410 – the people, materials, systems and landscapes out of which the communities of the fifth and sixth century emerged – and allow us to pursue an agenda of transformation and change.

My own contribution tackles these themes by considering evidence for the late fourth to seventh centuries in a single valley in England: the Avon Valley (Fig. 8.1). This is a valley which has been omitted from narratives which try to make sense of this transformational period, neglected perhaps because of its peripheral nature, and yet, as will be seen, it has a wealth of information to bring to the debate.

The Study Area

The River Avon flows through the west Midlands of England, rising near the Northamptonshire and Leicestershire county boundaries and flowing in a south-westerly direction for approximately 130 km to meet the River Severn at Tewkesbury which, in turn, empties into the Bristol Channel and the Atlantic Ocean (Fig. 8.2). It has been proposed variously that the Avon Valley was crossed by the frontier

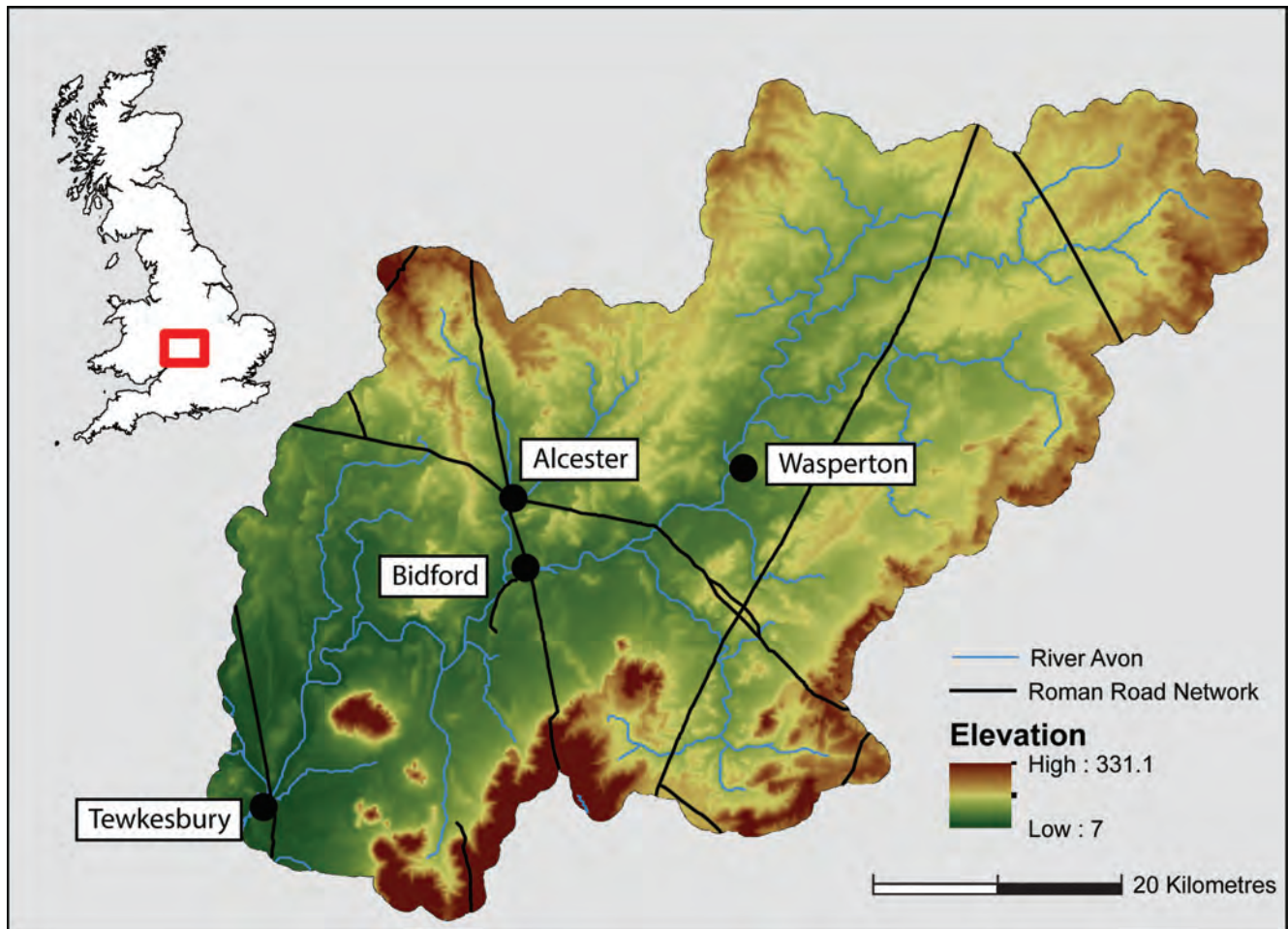


Figure 8.1 The Avon Valley and the main sites mentioned in the text (image: author)

between the Iron Age groups and Roman *civitates* of the Dobunni and the Corieltauvi (Todd 1973, 13–15; Whitwell 1982; Van Arsdell 1994, 24; Booth 1996, 53); the third- and fourth-century boundary of *Britannia Prima* (White 2007, 38–42); and the frontier between the Kingdoms of the Hwicce and Mercia in the seventh century (Stenton 1971, 44; Ford 1976, 277–278; Hooke 2009, 13–17). With research often focussed on datasets from territorial cores (cf Hamerow *et al.* 2013), perhaps it is a consequence of this liminal nature of the Avon Valley which has led to it being overlooked and understudied. As will be shown, however, close study of this valley can add real value to our understanding of the period spanning the Romano-British and early medieval periods. Indeed, the late fourth to seventh centuries in the Avon Valley are characterised by a series of transformations – of material cultural, burial practices and patterns of landscape use. These occurred at different scales, at different times, and followed different trajectories. While some communities were able to adapt and find a place in this new world, others were not. Below are presented two case studies which illustrate these varied processes and which, through careful analysis of the archaeological data, can

offer insights into the shifting socio-political and economic climate which affected these transformations.

Continuity and Adaptation: Wasperton

Continuity of place, practices and populations may suggest that socio-political and economic systems endured from the late Roman period well into the fifth and sixth centuries. At Wasperton, a burial site established in the fourth century, but which saw continued use into the seventh century, there is evidence to show that not only the burial enclosure endured, but certain practices did as well. However, Wasperton does not just paint a picture of Romano-British endurance – in other words, a community caught in time doing things how it always had done – but it reveals how this community reacted and adapted to external influences. This ability to change with the times, along with the riverine position of Wasperton (a feature revisited below), is likely to have been a major factor in the longevity of this site whereas so many of its contemporaries were abandoned.

The small village of Wasperton lies immediately south of the River Avon, in the central part of the Avon Valley,



Figure 8.2 The River Avon close to Wasperton (image courtesy of C. Tompkins)

within the district of Warwick. In the second century AD, a Romano-British agricultural settlement developed in the area south and east of the modern village. How this settlement tied in to the wider Roman landscape is not well understood: the closest contemporary settlement was 6 km to the west at Tiddington and the nearest identified villa lay approximately 8 km south-east, near Kineton (Booth 1996, 38; Carver *et al.* 2009, 127). Tiddington, also on the River Avon, was a moderately wealthy nucleated settlement with a possible regional market function (Palmer 1981, 23; Booth 1996, 38) and it may be that goods produced at Wasperton were transported along the river to Tiddington. In the later Romano-British period Wasperton seemingly drastically changed its function, switching from livestock management to the intensive processing of grain, as suggested by the creation of two corn-driers, two wells and ten ‘bread’ ovens (plus the recovery of numerous querns) and by the appropriation of an agricultural enclosure for the establishment of a cemetery in the fourth century (Carver *et al.* 2009, 19) (Fig. 8.3).

While some burials came to be made on adjacent land in the sixth century, the former agricultural enclosure remained the focus of funerary activity fully into the seventh century (Carver *et al.* 2009, 119–120). Within this enclosure, what the excavators called ‘Spatial Groups’ (SGs) – burials grouped both spatially and by similar practices and material culture – also persisted (*ibid.*, 114). For example, SG3 in the south-east corner of the enclosure is notable for its

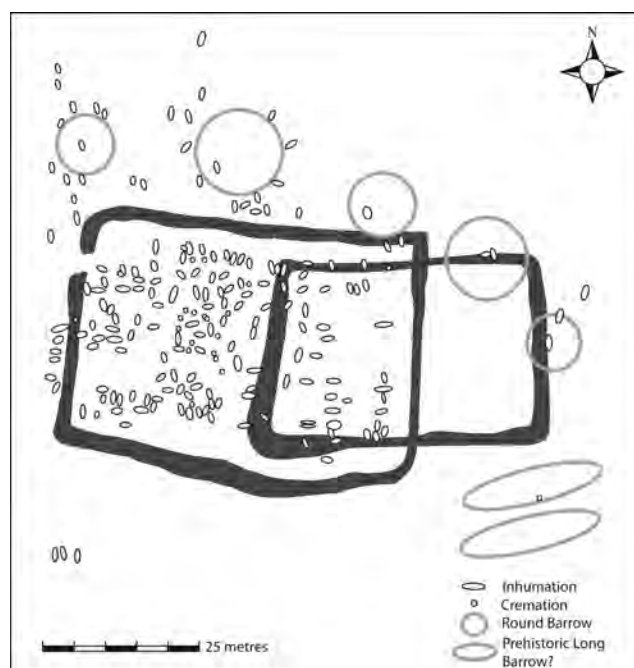


Figure 8.3 A plan of the fourth- to seventh-century cemetery at Wasperton (after Carver *et al.* 2009)

lack of grave goods, frequency of plank-lined burials and an absence of nailed coffins. Established in the late Roman period, later fifth-century burials do not disturb or intercut the earlier burials (*ibid.*, 105–107), indicating that either the

graves of SG3 were marked or that SG3 itself was delineated in some way, perhaps by paths (*ibid*, 114); either way, this shows regard by subsequent generations for the dead already interred in the cemetery, and a likely continuity of the community using the space.

Support for this view comes from evidence within the graves themselves, in terms of forms and practice. One notable aspect is the persistence of the practice of decapitation, identified in burials dating to the fourth and the sixth centuries, and possibly the fifth (Carver *et al.* 2009, 96–101). Cremations were most common in the late fifth- and early sixth-century phases, but three cremations have been dated to the Romano-British period: Cremation 23 (Cr. 23), based on the presence of hobnails, and Cr. 20 and Cr. 26, by radiocarbon dating (*ibid*, 118). These few burials suggest that cremation may have been a familiar rite to the post-Romano-British community at Wasperton and their appearance from the later fifth century may have been a re-appearance. The primary and secondary use of barrows was a feature of the early medieval phases at Wasperton (*ibid*, 120), as it is elsewhere in the Avon Valley (notably at Beckford A & B: Evison and Hill 1996; Churchover: Meaney 1964, 259; Long Itchington: Meaney 1964, 217; Marton: Bloxam 1875, 37) and, indeed, elsewhere in England (Semple 2013, 13). At Wasperton, however, two inhumations might suggest that this practice was not wholly imported into the valley in the early medieval period. These two burials, Inhumations 199 and 200, dated to the fourth century and the excavators argued that, given their isolation and their position outside the enclosure (a feature uncommon for this phase of the site), these perhaps had lain under a mound (Carver *et al.* 2009, 114). The fact that a mid- to later sixth-century burial, Inhumation 2, was positioned close to these burials (*ibid*, 120), in an area otherwise unused for burial, strengthens the argument that these Romano-British burials were marked in some way. Furthermore, the use of a nailed coffin in Inhumation 2, a structure most commonly found in fifth-century burials in the cemetery (*ibid*, 96–101), but also found in 199, provides an additional link between the practices of the Romano-British and early medieval periods. Finally, the 2/1 twill weave found with Inhumation 77 (dated to the late sixth or early seventh century) is far more likely to have been produced on a two-beam vertical loom common to the Romano-British period, but not the early medieval (*ibid*, 83–85, 101), implying continuity of this craft and this knowledge. Certainly, the other examples known from the Wasperton assemblage are associated with Romano-British period burials and have been identified in Romano-British phases elsewhere in the valley at Alveston Manor, Stretton-on-Fosse, and Bidford-on-Avon (*ibid*, 83–85; Walton Rogers 2007, 230).

The picture at Wasperton, however, is not merely one of continuity and stasis, since there is scientific evidence to suggest that this small community was the recipient of

new groups and new ideas. Thus, data from Oxygen isotope analysis point to the arrival of non-local people sporadically throughout the lifecycle of the site, with isotope signatures possibly indicating individuals originating from the west of Britain and even from southern Europe, possibly Italy or Spain (Carver *et al.* 2009, 48–49; cf Beard and Johnson 2000; Bentley and Knipper 2005 on the use and limitations of stable isotope data). People such as these, both settlers and others passing through, would have brought with them material culture and ideas about life, death and ritual which might have come to be adapted into the existing customs of the community. The plank- and plank/stone-lined inhumations dated to the fifth century at Wasperton, for example, have been likened to the cist-building tradition of western Britain (Carver *et al.* 2009, 132) and may have arrived with people travelling up the rivers Severn and Avon or along the Roman Fosse Way from Cirencester. Later in the fifth century, external influences come from the east and south, with ‘Anglo-Saxon’ material, particularly dress accessories and weapons, finding its way into Wasperton burials (*ibid*, 116). This material ebbed and flowed between the major production and distribution centres in the Upper Thames Valley (UTV) and the East Anglian regions, with that from the UTV coming to dominate assemblages from the latter half of the sixth century only to be replaced by material from the east and Kent by the end of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh century. Thus objects such as the two cast saucer brooches from Inhumation 24, typical of the brooches found in mid-sixth-century burials and UTV in style (*ibid*, 57, 119), were replaced by objects such as the composite disc brooch with applied gold foil from Inhumation 198 – an object likely to have originated from Kent or the south-east of England (*ibid*, 58, 334). Not merely objects in graves, these brooches reflect changes in costume and would have been highly visible statements. This pattern is reflected elsewhere in the Avon Valley (Tompkins 2017, 81–82) and implies successive phases of influence and shifting exchange connections across the early medieval period, possibly reflecting evolving socio-political networks which held sway in the valley (Fig. 8.4).

As deposition of burials at Wasperton drew to a close in the early seventh century, Inhumation 198 (Carver *et al.* 2009, 58, 234) embodied the wider transformations that this small community had undergone over the course of 300 years: it was part of the fourth- to seventh-century cemetery, but spatially distinct; in a reassertion of a fourth-century tradition, it was marked out by a barrow; it contained precious metals rarely seen in the Wasperton assemblage – two silver beads accompanied the gilt disc brooch – and it displayed links to a new part of the British Isles – Kent and the south-east.

This case study of Wasperton thus demonstrates, simultaneously, both continuity and change. It shows how influences external to the region were incorporated within

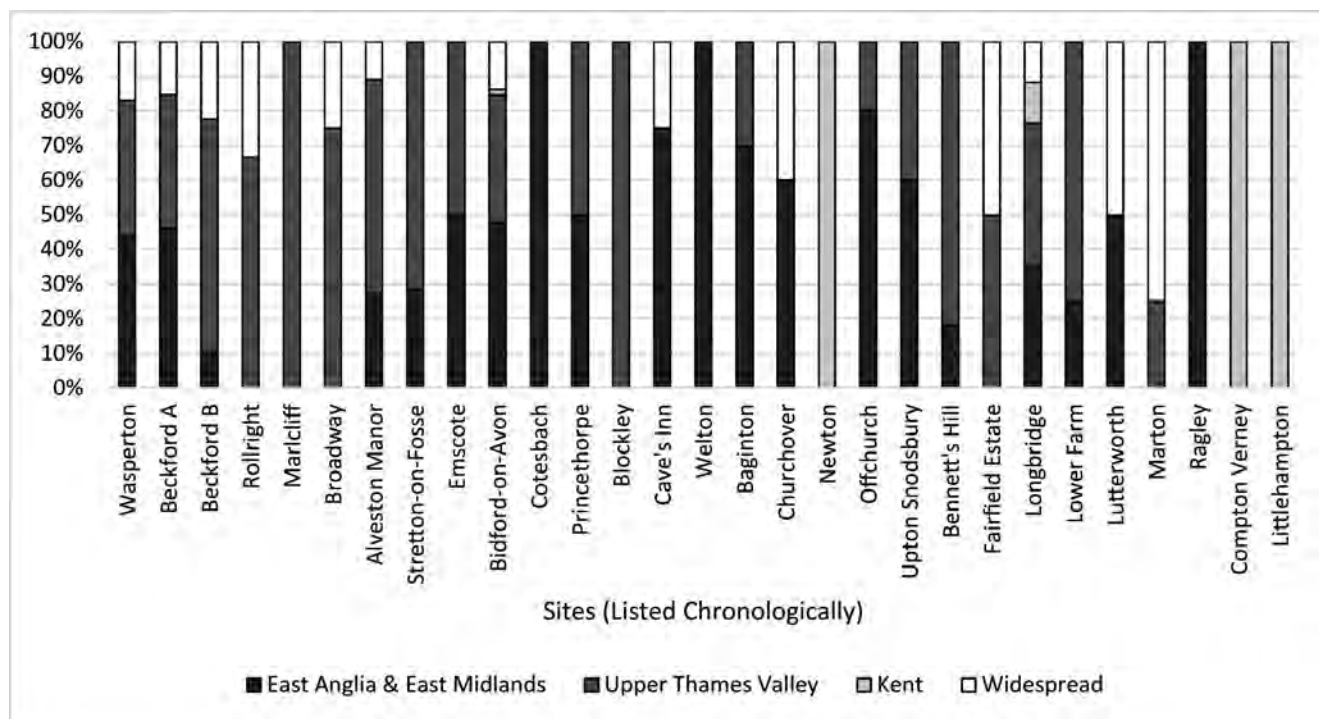


Figure 8.4 The percentage of dress accessories from each focus of distribution at burial sites across the Avon Valley. Listed by broad date of site foundation (image: author)

an existing and dynamic funerary tradition; how they were adopted and adapted to re-emerge as the trappings of a nascent elite. This implies active engagement on the part of the Romano-British community here, but also attests to the growing presence of new socio-political groups within the valley. Regardless of whether Germanic people or just their ideas and goods migrated into the Avon Valley, the changes wrought on local communities between the fourth and seventh centuries can be viewed as significant. The population at Wasperton might have continued in its place and in many of its customs, but it was also being irreversibly changed and by the seventh century the cemetery certainly lay within a new network and socio-cultural sphere. Elements of continuity at this site suggest two-way interaction in the formation of this emergent system, but it was undeniably a new system. Wasperton, perhaps as a compact, largely self-sufficient community, was able to find a place within this early medieval world but another Romano-British centre in the same valley, Alcester, was to decline.

Decline and Replacement: Alcester and Bidford-on-Avon

Further west in the central Avon Valley, and at a distance of only 5.5 km from each other, lay the Romano-British small town of Alcester and the early medieval cemetery at Bidford-on-Avon – arguably the most important sites in

the region during their respective periods. Having analysed the evidence at both sites a case can be made that their trajectories were connected: as Alcester went into decline it was being replaced by a community at/near the cemetery in Bidford-on-Avon. The evidence for this hypothesis and some consideration of its implications form the basis of this second case study.

The Romano-British small town of Alcester developed at the confluence of the rivers Alne and Arrow, tributaries of the River Avon, and at the point where two Roman roads – Ryknield Street and one of the Droitwich saltways – met and crossed the Arrow (Cracknell 1989, 57) (Fig. 8.5). An Iron Age origin for the settlement remains uncertain and the earliest evidence comes from a short-lived Conquest-period fort set 400 m south of the River Arrow (Cracknell and Mahany 1994, 257; Booth and Evans 2002, 301). This fort was succeeded in the AD 60s by what is also described as a fort, but which is only identified as such by a range of aligned buildings and the presence of a high number of associated military finds (Booth and Evans 2002, 301). From this military core a town grew to cover approximately 30 hectares at its height (Cracknell and Mahany 1994, 249). In its final phase, a defensive stone wall, dated by a coin of AD 364–7 in the demolition layers of a building cleared for its construction, was built to enclose an area of 9.3 hectares (Cracknell 1996, 133). Despite its military origins and late fourth-century defensive circuit, the demolition of the second fort during the early second century implies that the subsequent flourishing of the town came

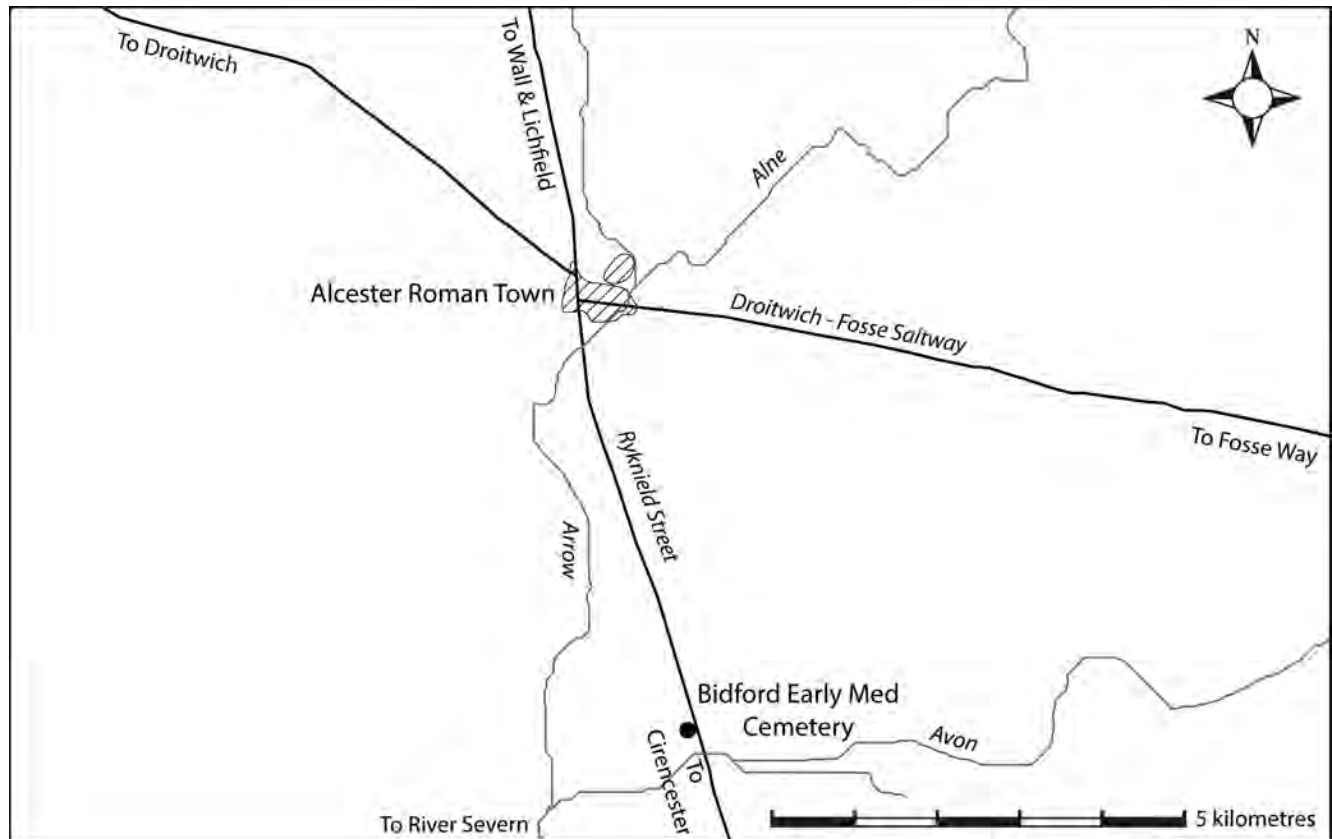


Figure 8.5 River and Roman Road connections at Alcester and Bidford-on-Avon (image: author)

from the efforts of its civic rather than its military population (Booth and Evans 2002, 303). Various economic functions have been suggested to explain the town's development: grain collection and storage, implied by the presence of a massive stone store building (Cracknell 1996, 134); a central market role, indicated by the large extra-mural market area which saw activity from the late first century until at least the late fourth (Cracknell 1989, 58–59); and engagement within the Droitwich salt distribution network (Cracknell and Mahany 1994, 257–258). Significantly, analysis of metalwork and pottery finds indicate that, economically, Alcester was most strongly linked to the Severn Valley (*ibid.*, 258). Access to this south-western part of Britain was probably by way of Ryknield Street, which ran south to Cirencester and the Fosse Way, and possibly the River Avon, 6 km to the south, which gave direct access to the River Severn, the city of Gloucester, and beyond.

The possibility that Alcester utilised the River Avon and Ryknield Street to access western markets leads onto consideration of Bidford-on-Avon, which lies on both of these routeways (Fig. 8.5): Ryknield Street runs south from Alcester to cross the Avon at Bidford, before continuing to join the Fosse Way just north of Cirencester (Margary 1967, 499), and the River Avon runs along the southern edge of the settlement to meet the River Arrow less than 2 km west of Bidford. Bidford-on-Avon conceivably therefore had a role

within Alcester's economic network, although little is known about its Romano-British phase beyond it being classed as a 'small roadside settlement ... [but] located at a major river crossing' (Booth 1996, 39). Yet the settlement did not lie in isolation: excavations in the Arrow Valley to the north and west have identified an intensively farmed agricultural landscape dating from the first century AD which culminated in a 'dispersed villa complex' lasting into the fourth century (Palmer 2000, 185–195). A broadly contemporary villa has been suggested at Welford-on-Avon based on pottery and building material scatters, aerial photographs and extensive metal-detector finds (Booth 1986). South of where Ryknield Street crossed the Avon, at Marlcliff, over 300 Roman coins and 100 metal objects have been found along with a minimum of five stone buildings (Hingley *et al.* 1987). To the west of this cluster, in the area of Cleeve Prior, a hoard of 100 gold and c. 3000 silver Roman coins was uncovered in 1811; contained in two red earthenware pots, the gold coins included issues of the fourth-century emperors Valentinian I, Gratian, Theodosius, and issues of Valentinian III (425–455) (Humphries *et al.* 1922, 90). Combined, this evidence suggests that the area around Bidford was a focus of activity in the third, fourth, and possibly fifth centuries (Fig. 8.6).

Accounts from the medieval abbey at Pershore reveal that the River Avon was navigable in the area of Bidford-on-Avon (Jones 2000, 68–69), whereas the much smaller River

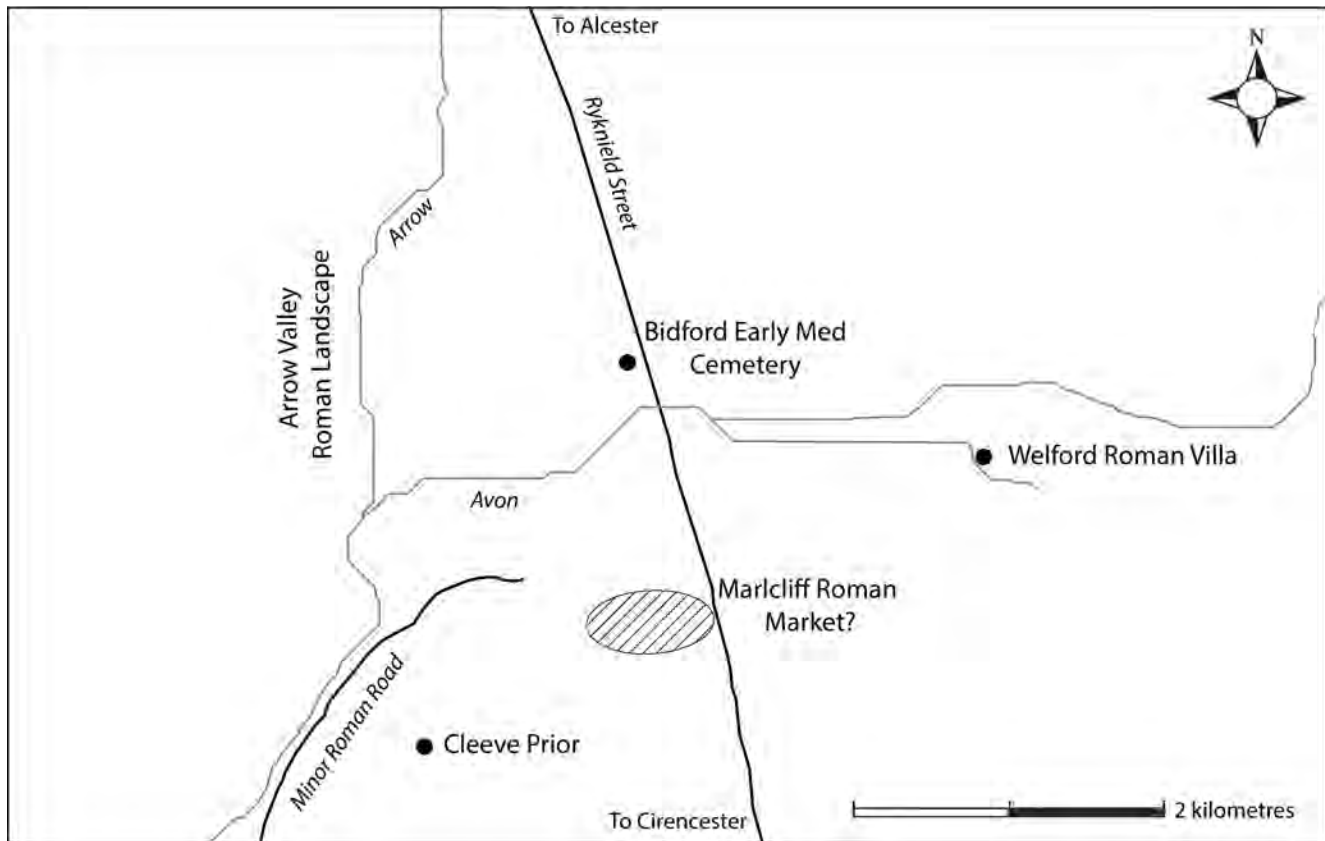


Figure 8.6 The Roman landscape surrounding Bidford-on-Avon (image: author)

Arrow, on which Alcester lies, was probably not capable of supporting riverine traffic to the Roman town. Potentially, therefore, the roadside settlement at Bidford-on-Avon had an additional (or perhaps even primary) function as a wharf for offloading of goods heading to or from Alcester. Support for such a model might derive from finds from fields between the confluence of the Avon and Arrow and the Ryknield Street ford where 172 Roman objects, 149 of which are coins, have been recorded by metal detectorists on the PAS (Portable Antiquities Scheme).¹ This high level of coin loss in these fields might denote evidence of transactions conducted at the point at which goods were transferred between land and river. Interestingly, 32% of these coins post-date AD 350, whereas the whole parish returns a figure of 21% of coins dating to this period. This would not only suggest that Bidford-on-Avon experienced a peak of activity in the late fourth century, thereby mirroring (defensive) building work at Alcester, but that this was most acute on the area of land between the confluence and the ford. Similarly, the development of the market place at Marlcliff on the Roman road south of the river crossing (Hingley *et al.* 1987), might be viewed as part of the same trade nexus and the prosperity seen at the third- to fourth-century villa complex in the Arrow Valley (Palmer 2000, 195) might be explained by its proximity to an inter-regional market. If such a market persisted into the very latest datable phases

of the Romano-British period, it then it would be reasonable to expect some continued use or ongoing influence into the earliest post-Romano-British period. It is in this context that we should explore the significance of this particular location as the site of the largest cemetery in the Avon Valley during the early medieval period.

Traces of early medieval activity at Alcester itself are elusive and it seems that the town was in decline in the fifth century. The scanty post-Roman evidence available comprises a beam-slot cut into an early to mid-fourth-century infant cemetery and associated with a rim sherd of Anglo-Saxon date (Booth and Evans 2002, 114–115); post-holes cut into a late fourth-century demolition layer (Booth 1989); two cremation urns and an inhumation with a sword reported in the early nineteenth century (Meaney 1964, 257); two sixth- or seventh-century Anglo-Saxon metal-detector finds – a silvered disc brooch and a zoomorphic belt fitting – from outside the town (Stokes and Brownsword 1984); and a worn coin of the emperor Honorius (Hughes 1961).

Conversely, it is in the fifth century that we observe an explosion of data from Bidford-on-Avon. At the site of the Romano-British market south of the Avon crossing, near Marlcliff, where coins attest to continued usage until at least the end of the fourth century, a number of metal objects, normally associated with burials – a saucer brooch, a sword

pyramid and mount, and a belt plate – have been identified which date broadly to the fifth and sixth centuries (Hingley *et al.* 1987). With little information on the finds, a precise date cannot be achieved, but the association with the late Romano-British market might support an early date. Then, in the latter part of the fifth century, the cemetery north of the river was established and persisted into the seventh century (Humphries *et al.* 1922, 1923). Victorian quarrying and the fragmentary nature of the investigations mean that it is probable that not all the burials have been identified (Humphries *et al.* 1923; Ford 1971; Hirst 1975; Webster and Cherry 1980, 230; Booth and Hodgson 1990); indeed, the quality of the earlier reports makes the total number excavated difficult to establish. Having scrutinised the evidence, Dickinson cautiously places the figure at around 264 inhumations and 158 cremations, but acknowledges that there could be as many as 500 individuals (pers. comm., November 2014). These figures make Bidford-on-Avon the largest early medieval cemetery known in the region and the most westerly example of the major mixed-rite cemeteries of the fifth- to seventh-century furnished burial tradition. Furthermore, Bidford-on-Avon stands out locally for its diversity of practices and material culture from a range of different production areas, being comparable only to Wasperton and Alveston Manor (Tompkins 2017, 240–243) – the latter an early medieval burial ground set between the Romano-British settlement of Tiddington and the ford on the Avon at Stratford (Ford, unpublished).

The characteristics of the Bidford cemetery may mark the site out as one of ‘supra-local’ status – incorporating people or practices from beyond its immediate locale – a suggestion raised by Duncan Sayer in 2014 and reflective of the dispersed settlement evidence in this area in the late Roman period (see discussion above). Support for such an interpretation might be found in two burials: Inhumation 182 and HB2. Inhumation 182 stands out not only for its number and quality of grave goods, but also because of the link it implies to a site on the southern slopes of the valley – Stretton-on-Fosse. This burial was accompanied by an iron knife at the waist, an iron spearhead at the left shoulder, an iron shield boss plated with copper alloy and gold over the left arm, and a bronze bowl placed on a wooden plank above the skull. The bowl was formed out of a single sheet of bronze with the sides turned over to form a rim. Protruding from this were two triangular lugs pierced with circular holes which held an iron handle (Humphries *et al.* 1923, 276). In form this bowl is identical to the description of the ‘Gotland cauldron’ from inhumation F88 at Stretton-on-Fosse. This second cauldron was also found in a position associated with the head, although in this grave it took the place of the skull which had been removed and placed on the left femur (Ford 2003, 55–56). Other similarities between these graves are the inclusion of a spearhead and copper alloy plated shield boss in F88. It is possible that these two

graves, among the most richly furnished in their respective cemeteries (Humphries *et al.* 1923, 275–276; Ford 2003, 103), belonged to a shared elite tradition which spanned the central part of the valley.

A second inhumation at Bidford-on-Avon, HB2 – labelled by Dickinson as the ‘cunning woman’ (1992) – reinforces the image of complex social stratification through the presence of individuals thought to have held specialist roles. HB2 was buried with a range of items believed to be amuletic in nature – particularly 12 objects interpreted as miniature buckets, an antler cone, and a knife with an unusually long, decorated bone handle reminiscent of a scalpel; the occupant was thus interpreted as a woman fulfilling a dedicated healing and prophetic function within the community.

Despite its size, complexity and potential regional importance, at some point during the seventh century the cemetery ceased as a place for burial, even though activity in the immediate area did not stop. To the east of the cemetery, a mid-seventh- to mid-ninth-century site has been identified and interpreted as a ‘productive site’ (Metcalf 2003; Maddicott 2005; Naylor and Richards 2010). Ulmschneider’s survey (2000) in Lincolnshire defined the inland type of these sites as: being found on major communication routes; having a high number of eighth- and ninth-century coins and non-ferrous objects, such as pins, hooked tags and strap-ends; and featuring evidence of production. With 19 coins and 28 artefacts dating to between AD 650 and 900 identified as of 2010 (see Naylor and Richards 2010, 194), Bidford-on-Avon represents one of only two such examples outside the south and east of England, the other being Meols on the Wirral (Maddicott 2005, 46). The combined date ranges of the coins and artefacts suggests that activity on the site experienced two peaks: the first from AD 650 to c. 700 and a second from AD 790–810 (Naylor and Richards 2010, 196). The earlier peak is immediately subsequent to (or even coincident with) the final phase of the cemetery. The trade plied through this site in the Middle Saxon period is again subject to interpretation: Metcalf (2003, 43) has argued that the high percentage of Frisian sceattas at the site – 47%, compared to a figure of 20.6% across the rest of England – may indicate the presence of continental wool traders; in contrast, Maddicott (2005) and Naylor and Richards (2010), draw upon Bidford-on-Avon’s link to Droitwich, whose industry has been confirmed in this period by the series of early eighth-century charters, and the contemporary place-name of Saltford Major (now Salford Priors), which lies approximately 2.6 km from the Avon crossing at Bidford (Gover *et al.* 1936, 220; Hooke 1981, 135).

Once again it would seem that Bidford-on-Avon was functioning within an inter-regional distribution network, probably linking into the Avon and Severn river systems along with the Roman road system to the south. Although evidence for settlement is lacking for the fifth and sixth

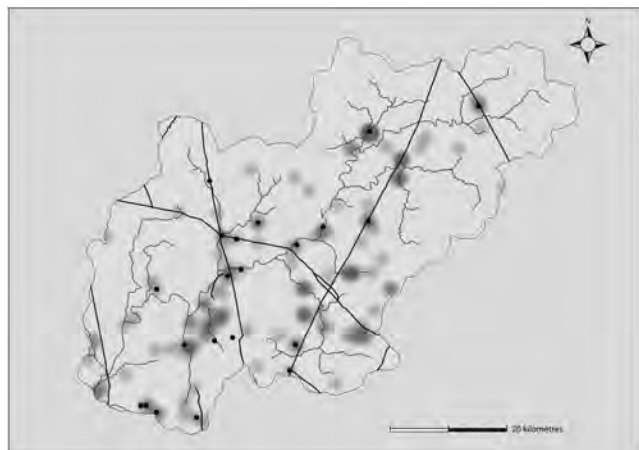


Figure 8.7 Kernel Density Estimate map showing Romano-British activity in the Avon Valley. Sites with late fourth-century activity and roads are superimposed in black (image: author)

centuries, the similarities seen at Romano-British and middle-Saxon Bidford-on-Avon allow for an economic network, potentially centred on the Droitwich salt industry, continuing throughout this period. In this context, the presence of a major cemetery is more comprehensible and the possibility exists that Bidford-on-Avon ‘replaced’ Alcester as a hub within a wider network of exchange.

To conclude this case study, it is necessary to offer some thoughts on why Bidford-on-Avon may have endured while Alcester declined and what the implications of this might be. Analysis of the distribution of sites and PAS finds in the Avon Valley suggests that the Roman road network did not go out of use in the fifth century (Tompkins 2017, 62–63) and we should not, therefore, expect Alcester’s position on this road network, rather than on the river, to explain its decline. Instead we should perhaps see this switch in focus as further evidence of the more general contraction which occurred in the early medieval period. Starting in the late Romano-British period, those sites distant from either main rivers or major roads appear to have gone out of use (Fig. 8.7). This escalated in the fifth and sixth centuries with the River Avon becoming the main focus (*ibid*, 117–127). Additionally, the development of post-Roman/early medieval polities focussed on major rivers has been observed across England (cf Draper 2006, 69; Semple 2008; Hamerow *et al.* 2013) and it may be that Bidford’s position on the Avon was better suited for this new pattern of landscape use. This riverine focus was perhaps a factor in the perseverance of the community at Wasperton, which also lay beside the banks of the River Avon.

If the interpretation that Bidford-on-Avon replaced Alcester within an inter-regional distribution network is correct then significant implications exist for the transformation of the landscape across the Romano-British and early medieval divide. As with the burial practices observed at Wasperton, the continued use of this network was significantly altered to fit

within a new socio-political/cultural system; the elites of the fifth and sixth centuries were able to draw upon an established practice and manipulated it to meet their own requirements. Such an interpretation need not populate the Bidford-on-Avon or Wasperton cemeteries with Germanic/Anglo-Saxon migrants, but instead allows for the agency of the Romano-British within a familiar and established network.

Conclusion

In both the case studies we have seen that continuity could exist alongside change. At Wasperton there was evidence that Romano-British practices persisted alongside growing influences from non-local groups, promoting change through interaction and adaptation and through what Ambridge (2007) and Meskell (2007, 223) described as ‘cultural reconciliation’, namely the negotiation of memories and traditions within the framework of a new socio-political identity. Argued to be part of the same economic system, the rise of Bidford-on-Avon was reasoned to coincide with the decay of fifth-century Alcester as the existing trade and exchange network was brought under a new system of control. In both cases, therefore, there is evidence to suggest that late Romano-British practices (and populations) persisted. These were harnessed by the fifth- and sixth-century elite, and as external influences increased and engagement with these developed, so existing traditions quickly found themselves transformed and used within a new socio-political landscape.

As a final thought, and to return to the peripheral nature of the Avon Valley in the early medieval period as suggested by historical sources, it is possible that the endurance of Wasperton and Bidford-on-Avon was linked to their position within a *frontier* zone. The size of the cemetery at Bidford and its diversity of practices and assemblages has already been examined, but a similar pattern can be observed at Wasperton and at Alveston Manor – a cemetery not considered here, but which was adjacent to the aforementioned Romano-British settlement and market at Tiddington (Ford, unpub; Jones 2002, 2010; Palmer 1981). At these three major cemeteries, and at other smaller burial sites in central part of the Avon Valley, there appears to have been a coalescence of people and ideas not seen elsewhere (Tompkins 2017, 221–243). This manifests in the mixing of distinct practices from the east and west of the valley: the inclusion of cremations alongside inhumations; a greater range of inhumation orientations; and a more even distribution of material from both East Anglian/East Midlands regions and the Upper Thames Valley.

One explanation for this coming together of people might be the presence of a socio-political/cultural frontier in the area which stimulated contact and exchange. Such a frontier need not be marked by a boundary, either man-made or natural, nor need it be fixed or impermeable. Like

the material culture at Wasperton, the frontier is likely to have ebbed and flowed and been recognised by those who were actors in its creation and its maintenance, wearing their socio-political allegiances like a brooch on their cloak or a great hall complex on a hill. For let us not forget that it is in this same landscape that the great hall complexes of Hatton Rock and Long Itchington were built in the late sixth or early seventh centuries (Rahtz 1970; Hirst and Rahtz 1973; Palmer 2009, 69–163).

The Avon Valley and its position in a frontier zone is, however, the subject of a future paper; what is pertinent here is that the persistence of Bidford-on-Avon and Wasperton, two sites in an oft overlooked and ‘peripheral’ part of Britain, might not only signal transformation and adaptation from the Romano-British period, but may also provide good evidence for the emergence of thriving communities on the edge of what was to become one of the greatest and most enigmatic early medieval kingdoms in Britain – Mercia.

Note

- 1 <https://finds.org.uk/database>

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Changing Landscapes? Land, People and Environment in England, AD 350–600

Stephen Rippon

Introduction: Moving Beyond Traditional Compartmentalisations of the Past

The traditional view is that Roman Britain ended relatively abruptly and decisively in the early fifth century: its market-based economy collapsed, its towns and military installations became deserted and its villa estates abandoned (e.g. Faulkner 2000). The archaeological record has been seen to suggest a clear break, with material culture and architectural styles that had been strongly influenced by the Roman world replaced, especially in the eastern half of the former province, by new forms of artefacts, settlements and burial practice introduced by Anglo-Saxon migrants from the mid-fifth century onwards. In part, this view of what happened in the fifth century reflects the meagre documentary sources that exist for this period, and the Anglo-Saxon supremacy that was eventually achieved, although we must remember that texts are written by particular people with particular agendas, and stressing chaos and defeat on the part of British communities suited many of those writing about this period (even the sixth-century Briton Gildas who bemoaned the state of native society). The impression of discontinuity is also, however, very much a product of the way that academic research has been conducted in the past, notably with different scholars, learned societies and journals focussing on the ‘Roman’, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ or ‘medieval’ periods.

As is increasingly recognised now, there are of course many problems with this crude, history-driven compartmentalisation of the past, and the emphasis that some scholars now place upon understanding landscapes and the transitions between traditional periods – of which this volume is an example – provides a very different perspective. This is an approach that is far more open to seeing *continuities* within society (or, for this period,

potentially multiple societies) and in the countryside. The fourth to sixth centuries AD in Britain are of particular interest for a number of reasons. Firstly, these centuries undoubtedly marked a profound change for the higher echelons of society – the political, commercial and land-owning elites – although how far this was true for the vast majority of the rural population will be explored in more depth below. Secondly, this is a period in which we can explore one of the major questions that has faced, dogged and challenged archaeologists of all periods, namely the extent to which change within the archaeological record can be explained by *external* factors such as migration, as opposed to indigenous developments such as expanding trade and exchange. Thirdly, there is scope to look beyond texts and material culture in order to explore wider issues such as climatic change whose profile within contemporary society is currently high. In this paper, therefore, I will consider Britain during the fourth to sixth centuries from an explicitly landscape perspective, exploring what became of the late Roman countryside in this transitional period that saw such profound socio-political, cultural and economic transformations.

The data used in this paper are drawn from two major projects. The first, *The Fields of Britannia* (Rippon *et al.* 2014, 2015), explored patterns of land-use during and across the first millennium AD and the stratigraphic relationship between late Roman and early medieval field systems, while the second, *Kingdom, Civitas, and County* (Rippon, 2018) examined the development of regional and local-scale socio-economic and territorial structures within which communities managed their landscapes across eastern England. Through the data-sets presented here, an attempt will be made to explore landscape development at national, regional and local scales in order to present both a ‘big

picture' overview as well as examples of local landscape biographies.

A Roman Inheritance

What happened in the fifth century can only be understood against a backdrop of the evolving landscape of the late Roman period. Although, traditionally, Romanists have described *Britannia* in terms of a binary division between military and civilian, upland and lowland, and native and villa (e.g. Haverfield 1912; Fox 1932; Dark and Dark 1997), recent work has increasingly shown that there was significant local and regional variation in settlement patterns and material culture (e.g. Cool 1990; Taylor 2007; Crummy and Eckardt 2008; Laycock 2008; Smith *et al.* 2016; Rippon, 2018). Figure 9.1A, for example, shows the road network, urban hierarchy and possible/probable/certain villas across eastern England, showing how communities in regions such as East Anglia (north of the Gipping-Lark valleys) were far less interested in displaying their Roman identity in these ways compared to areas such as the northern Thames Basin and south-east Midlands.

It was into this varied landscape that the Anglo-Saxon migrations occurred. There has been much debate within archaeology over the role of migration in shaping cultural change, and the Roman to medieval transition is crucial to this debate. Some scholars have argued for a mass folk migration of Anglo-Saxons that almost entirely displaced the native population, while others have suggested that a small warrior elite achieved political supremacy through military conquest (a process evident in the Roman and Norman conquests). The truth is most likely to lie somewhere in between. Estimating absolute populations based upon the archaeological record is extremely difficult, and traditional approaches have focused upon using well-studied landscapes to estimate the densities of settlements, the average populations living in those places, and then interpolating this across Britain as a whole: Millett (1990, table 8.5), for example, suggests a population in late Roman Britain of 3.7 million. Such approaches are fraught with difficulties as the best studied landscapes will be those where archaeological sites are most easily visible and where there has been the greatest amount of archaeological survey and excavation, but these will tend to be in either the most densely settled core agricultural areas (e.g. the major river valleys where the greatest gravel extraction and urban expansion is occurring) and in extremely marginal landscapes where preservation is good because the Romano-British landscapes were later abandoned (e.g. coastal wetlands and chalk downland: Phillips 1970; Hall and Coles 1994; Fulford *et al.* 2006). It is unlikely that settlement density and size in these landscapes are typical of Britain as a whole.

Another approach is, therefore, to seek to reconstruct relative changes in population, for example by attempting to

establish which periods saw the expansion and contraction of both individual settlements and patterns of settlement overall. The *Roman Rural Settlement Project*, for example, has clearly shown that the numbers of excavated sites declined across Britain during the fourth century, and there is no evidence for an equivalent increase in settlement size (i.e. nucleation) to compensate (Smith *et al.* 2016). If anything, urban populations appear to have been declining in a similar way. Faulkner (2000, figs 10–11, 26, 33–34 and 60), for example has tried to quantify the prosperity and decline in settlements through a series of calculations including the number of high status houses in towns and the number of rooms occupied in town houses, and while there are many methodological problems with this approach – such as dating and identifying just which rooms were used at specific times, and for what purposes – this does at least provide a rough indication of broad trends, which are all downward.

It seems clear, therefore, that the population of late Roman Britain was declining, but that the landscape was far from having been deserted. So, what was the relationship between this late Romano-British landscape and the Anglo-Saxon colonisation? The oft-reproduced maps showing the distribution of Anglo-Saxon burials give the impression of an immigrant presence that was spread right across most of eastern and central England, although closer examination of the evidence suggests that this was not the case: as long ago as the 1930s, for example, Mortimer Wheeler (1935) noted the scarcity of Anglo-Saxon burials in the area north of London, speculating that this area may have been a British enclave. In recent years, the increased archaeological survey and excavation brought about through *PPG16* and its successors (i.e. rescue and developer-led archaeology) has transformed our understanding of the density and distribution of settlement in all periods and regions, particularly so for this northern Thames Basin. While these data are extremely informative in showing that Anglo-Saxon colonisation occurred in some areas but not in others, we cannot use it to reconstruct absolute population trends because of a missing part of the picture: namely the native British population that appear to have continued to live in many areas that did not see Anglo-Saxon colonisation but which are far less archaeologically visible than the immigrants (this is discussed further below). The scale of the Anglo-Saxon migration is also much disputed, with Alcock (1971, 311), for example, suggesting a figure around 50,000–100,000 immigrants, compared to M. E. Jones' (1996, 26) estimate of 10,000–20,000. Other scholars see a negligible Anglo-Saxon migration, with Pryor (2004, 96, 214), for example, notably arguing that 'Anglo-Saxon mass migrations into Britain never happened'.

The actual scale of the Anglo-Saxon migrations will always be difficult to determine, but it is clear that the large size of some Anglo-Saxon settlements and cemeteries is

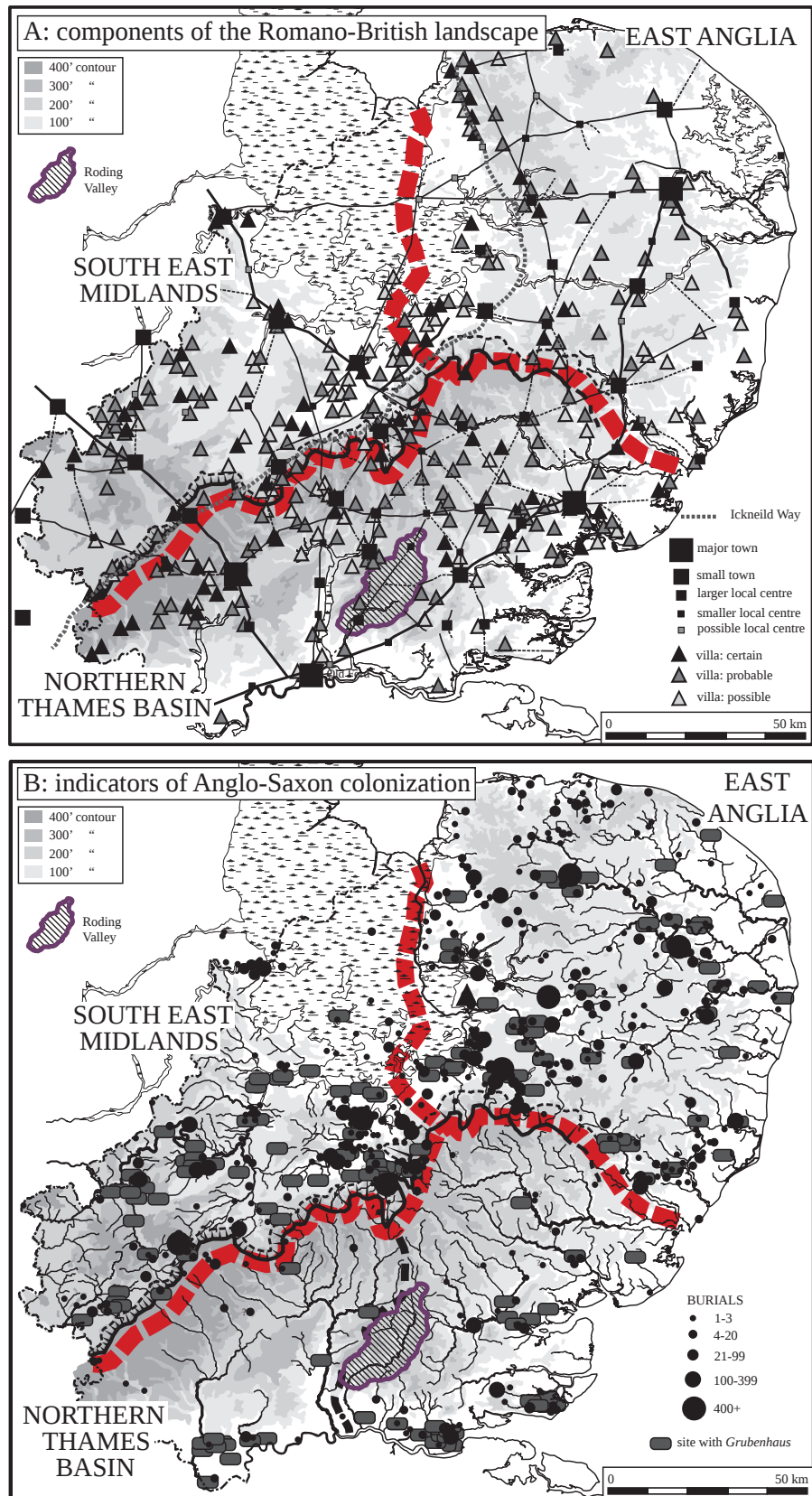


Figure 9.1 The boundaries between the northern Thames Basin, East Anglia, and south-east Midlands, and the location of the Roding Valley early folk territory, in relation to (A) selected components of the Romano-British landscape (the urban hierarchy, villas, and roads), and (B) indicators of Anglo-Saxon colonisation (Grubenhäuser and furnished pagan burials)

deceptive. Where closely datable finds have been recovered it can be recognised that archaeological sites with several hundred buildings actually comprised relatively small settlements that shifted around over time (e.g. West Stow in Suffolk: West 1985; Mucking in Essex: Hamerow 1993). It would be really helpful if specifically fifth-century settlements could be identified but unfortunately this is often not possible as the pottery is simply dated as ‘fifth to sixth century’ or ‘early Anglo Saxon’, sometimes because very few finds are recovered (e.g. Cowie and Blackmore 2008; Powell *et al.* 2015, 110). Similarly, large richly-furnished cemeteries give the impression of large communities, but as their use almost invariably extended over a long period of time, so even quite large-looking cemeteries may have served a small hamlet-sized settlement. At Barrington, in Cambridgeshire, for example, Malim and Hines (1998, xviii) suggest that the c. 300 graves were laid out over c. 150 years, giving an average of c. two burials per annum, indicating that the cemetery served a community of around 50–65 persons. On this basis, the 257 burials at Springfield Lyons (Essex: Tyler and Major 2005), covering c. AD 450–700 (one burial per annum), probably served a community of around 30, and the c. 200 graves at Flixton (Suffolk: Boulter and Walton Rogers 2012) that cover c. 170 years between the late fifth and mid-seventh centuries suggest a community of perhaps 30–40 (equating to just over one burial per annum).

Overall, the landscape archaeological evidence suggests that there was a small but significant Anglo-Saxon immigrant population living in eastern England, although it is my contention here that it was far from evenly spread across the landscape (see Rippon, 2018, for a fuller discussion). A key indicator of Anglo-Saxon colonisation should be the presence of *Grubenhäuser* (‘sunken-featured buildings’) since this distinctive form of architecture has no precedence in late Roman Britain. Although it has been proposed that ‘sunken-featured buildings’ found on some Roman sites were the predecessors of *Grubenhäuser*, Tipper (2004, 7–11) has convincingly shown that this was not the case and that they instead represent an entirely different building tradition of cellars with revetted sides, entrance stairways, and floors associated with hearths and sunken storage jars (e.g. examples at King Harry Lane in *Verulamium*: Stead and Rigby 1989). It is therefore frustrating that the term ‘sunken-featured building’ is still used for these Roman cellars as it is extremely misleading. At Tothill Street in Minster-in-Thanet, Kent, for example, a large, rectangular, 0.5 m deep, vertical-sided and flat-bottomed ‘sunken-featured building’ is clearly a cellar as it had a floor on which was a hearth, and into which a pit had been cut; it was back-filled in the first century AD (Birchenough 2010) and is wholly unrelated to fifth- and sixth-century Anglo-Saxon *Grubenhäuser*.

Despite their providing clear evidence for Anglo-Saxon immigration, the distribution of *Grubenhäuser* is, however, poorly understood, with distribution maps in Tipper (2004)

and Hamerow (2012) being of selected places referred to in the text. Indeed, when the complete distribution of known sites is mapped across eastern England, we can observe that *Grubenhäuser* were not evenly spread across the landscape. Instead there are three subtly different patterns: firstly, in East Anglia, as far south as the Gipping and Lark Valleys in Suffolk, they are found across most *pays* including on the heavy claylands; secondly, in the south-east Midlands, as far south as the chalk escarpment, they are largely restricted to the river valleys and are conspicuously absent from the claylands, despite there having been a large number of recent large-scale excavations there; and, thirdly, across the northern Thames Basin these new house forms are restricted to coastal and estuarine districts, and again are conspicuously absent from the claylands (Fig. 9.1B). Such patterns are repeated in the distributions of burials in the ‘Anglo-Saxon’ tradition (that is ones with Germanic-style grave goods: seventh-century ‘final phase’ cemeteries are not included here as they date after the so-called migration period). These fifth- to sixth-century cemeteries are mapped for eastern England in Figure 9.1B where the size of the circles is in proportion to the number of graves; this is significant because the scale of these cemeteries varies enormously across eastern England.

What is particularly striking about the northern Thames Basin and some clayland areas of the south-east Midlands are the large areas which lack evidence for Anglo-Saxon colonisation. These are areas that have, however, seen considerable archaeological survey, excavation, and the reporting of finds from metal detecting. Indeed, major infrastructure developments and the expansion of urban centres means that many of these claylands have seen extensive archaeological investigations which have revealed a high density of late prehistoric, Romano-British and later medieval sites, but none from the fifth to sixth centuries.¹

The scale of archaeological work here, however, allows us to be fairly confident that these areas were not extensively settled by communities with an Anglo-Saxon identity, which raises two possibilities: firstly, that what had in the Roman period been an extensively settled landscape was now largely abandoned, or, secondly, that they continued to be occupied by communities who currently are not archaeologically visible. Three strands of evidence support the latter hypothesis: (1) palaeoenvironmental evidence – notably pollen – from a number of sites shows no extensive woodland regeneration in the post-Roman period (e.g. Camborne New Settlement and A428: Abrams and Ingham 2008; Wright *et al.* 2009; Stansted palaeochannel: Havis and Books 2005); (2) at various places, sherds of fifth- to seventh-century pottery have been recovered from the upper fills of late Romano-British ditches, suggesting a landscape still being managed and probably manured; and (3) occasional sites have revealed stratigraphic sequences, changes in faunal assemblages and new forms of material

culture that would appear to indicate that occupation continued into the early medieval period. At Childerley Gate, for example, occupation of a late Romano-British farmstead clearly extended beyond the end of the fourth century and an artefact-rich ‘dark earth’ formed across the site (Abrams and Ingham 2008, 99); there was also a distinctive change in the animal bone assemblage from cattle to sheep/goat, which reflects a trend seen more widely in this period (Sykes 2007, app. 1b; Rippon *et al.* 2014, table 3, 2015, table 3.4). Alongside the latest Romano-British mass-produced wares was a small amount of pottery with a grog-tempered fabric: although published as ‘proto-Saxon’ (Abrams and Ingham 2008, 100), there is nothing else Anglo-Saxon on the site, and instead this pottery probably represents sub-Roman production (Rippon, 2018).

Overall, the evidence points to an Anglo-Saxon colonisation of eastern England that was patchy in its extent, and which occurred within the context of a substantial British population that continued to occupy (potentially) extensive parts of the landscape. Who was ‘in control’ at this time can only be a matter for speculation, although when we examine particular sites a strong sense emerges that Anglo-Saxon settlement in the coastal fringes of the northern Thames Basin occurred within parts of the Romano-British landscape that had been abandoned (e.g. Mucking: Hamerow 1993; Hirst and Clark 2009; Lucy and Evans 2016; North Shoebury: Wymer and Brown 1995; Orsett Cock: Carter 1998).

The Fields of *Britannia*

While a large number of fifth- to sixth-century ‘Anglo-Saxon’ settlements have now been recognised through both excavation and fieldwalking, the nature of the field systems with which they were associated is less well understood. It is striking that the settlements themselves lack ditched property or roadside boundaries, and where excavations have extended beyond the settlements themselves there was similarly a marked absence of evidence for field systems (e.g. Mucking, North Shoebury, and Orsett Cock: see above; West Stow: West 1985). Some scholars have speculated that in part the reason for this was because Romano-British fields remained in use; for example, Taylor (1981, 20) suggests that:

whenever or however the Saxons developed open fields, these had to be based on a pre-existing system of agriculture and field shapes and did not evolve in an empty countryside devoid of any remains of earlier farming. Whether the existing system or the fields were still in use when the open fields as they are understood finally evolved is a question that cannot be answered at the moment. But the main point is that the open-field system was at least partly based on what was already there.

Across the country, anecdotal evidence had started to emerge for just such continuity (e.g. the Midlands: Green 1978, 115; Taylor and Fowler 1978; Upex 2003; Gloucestershire: Thomas *et al.* 2003; East Anglia: Percival and Williamson 2005), but how widespread was it? The possible survival of a substantial late Romano-British population implies that there may have been a considerable degree of continuity within the management of the rural landscape; this was a key theme explored through the *Fields of Britannia* project. This study comprised three components: firstly, the analysis of palaeoenvironmental sequences to establish broad patterns of continuity or change in land-use; secondly, the analysis of archaeological evidence for the relationship between excavated Romano-British settlements/field-systems and the historic landscape (both discussed in Rippon *et al.* 2015); and, thirdly, evidence for continuity in settlement patterns (Fleming 2016).

The analysis of archaeological evidence for the relationship between excavated Romano-British settlements and field-systems and the historic landscape quantified the occurrence of three possible relationships: (1) one where excavated Romano-British landscapes were on the same orientation as medieval field systems; (2) where they shared the same specific alignments; or (3) where there was no relationship. Note that Romano-British field systems that occur in areas of the landscape without medieval field systems were excluded from the analysis. One example to highlight is at Weedon Hill near Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire, shown in Figure 9.2. This extensively excavated Romano-British field system is clearly on the same orientation as the ridge and furrow within the overlying medieval open field. Across lowland Britain as a whole – unfortunately, as yet, there are insufficient excavated sites from upland areas to make any analysis statistically valid – around 60–70% of Romano-British landscapes that were succeeded by medieval field systems that shared the same orientation, although there were marked regional variations in the extent to which this occurs. The greatest incidence is in the ‘Central Province’ and East Anglia, and the lowest in the South West (Figure 9.3). It should be stressed that Romano-British sites in areas *without* field systems of medieval character (that will include extensive areas of woodland and unenclosed common pasture) were excluded from the analysis, as were coastal wetlands that were flooded in the post-Roman period, which means that we cannot say that 60–70% of the Romano-British landscape shows this degree of potential continuity. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that Figure 9.3 offers a regional-scale summary of data from various discrete districts whose character varied considerably, and it is likely that the degree of continuity and discontinuity will have been different within individual *pays*. Unfortunately, however, there are at present very few *pays* with sufficient appropriate excavations to make a statistical analysis valid, which is why the data have, at this stage,

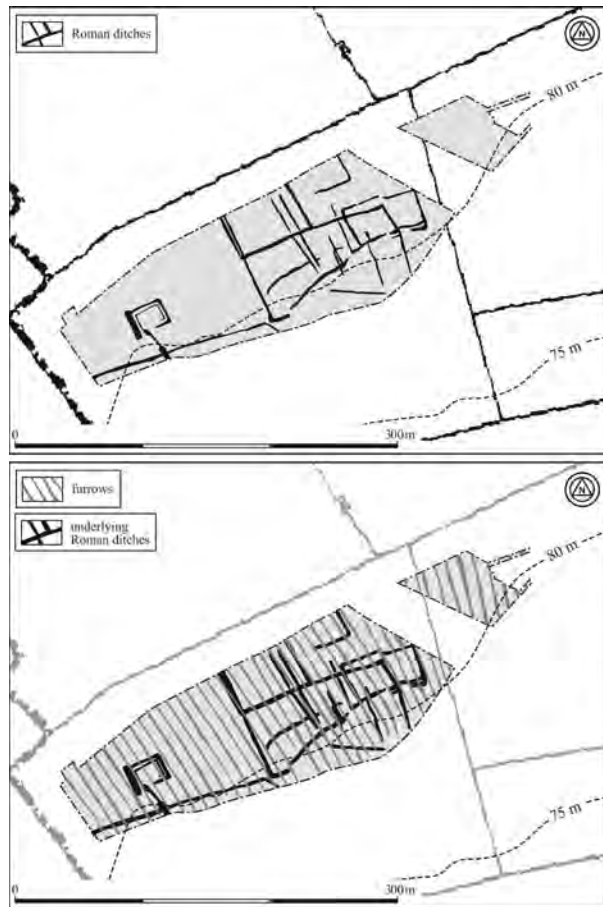


Figure 9.2 The excavations at Weedon Hill, near Aylesbury (Buckinghamshire) where extensive excavations revealed a Romano-British enclosure complex on the same orientation as the overlying ridge and furrow, and the post-enclosure historic landscape (after Wakeham 2007; OS 1st Edition Six Inch base map: © Crown Copyright and Landmark Information Group Limited (2013), all rights reserved, 1884; drawn by Chris Smart)

been summarised at a *regional* scale (which is at least an improvement on the old binary divisions between upland/lowland, military/civilian, and native/villa landscapes).

Broad Patterns of Land-use

This close relationship between the physical fabric of the Roman and medieval fieldscapes suggests the potential for *broad continuity* in land-use: this does not mean that the fields were continuously ploughed, but rather that a prolonged period of total abandonment is highly unlikely. Long-term field observations at the Rothamsted Experimental Station at Harpenden, in Hertfordshire, for example, have revealed that woodland regeneration on former arable land happens within 10–30 years (Harmer *et al.* 2001). This is confirmed by the analysis of historic maps, such as sequential revised editions of the Ordnance Survey, that show how agricultural fields will be invaded by scrub and regenerated woodland within 20 to

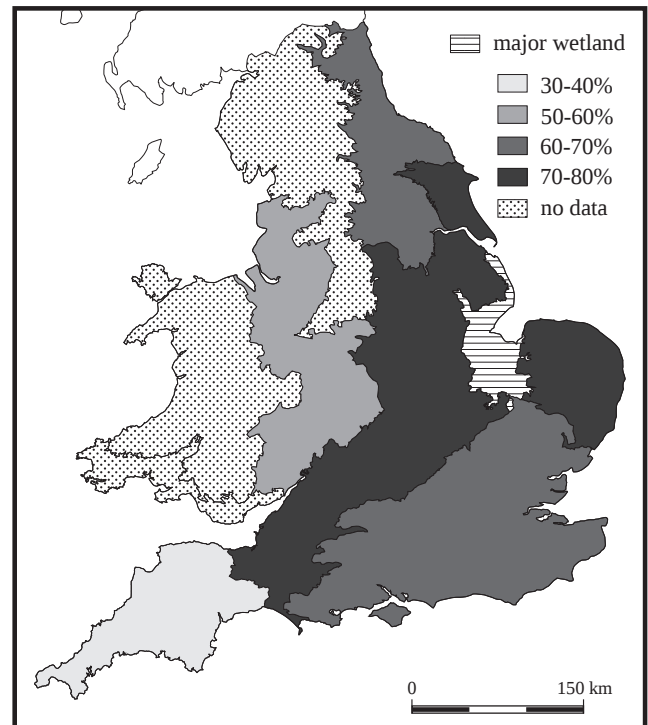


Figure 9.3 The extent to which excavated Romano-British field boundaries across different regions share the same orientation and/or alignment with excavated medieval field systems or historic landscapes characterized by former medieval open fields (that had been enclosed by agreement and so fossilize their distinctive long, narrow fields and furlong boundaries) or closes held in severalty (see Rippon *et al.* 2015 for a full discussion of the methodology; drawn by Chris Smart)

30 years (e.g. the Benfleet Downs in Essex: Rippon 2012b, 7). While it is conceivable that the removal of woodland could reveal the earthworks of an earlier field system that was then rehabilitated, in practice the process of clearing trees and grubbing out stumps would surely destroy or at least render the remains of any relict field system so incoherent that they would simply have been flattened and replaced.

So, was there a woodland regeneration? Another strand of the *Fields of Britannia* Project was an analysis of pollen evidence, exploiting a now significant number of pollen sequences from lowland areas for the Roman and the early medieval periods. From these some striking differences in land-use emerge. Figure 9.4 summarises the pollen evidence from each of the *Fields of Britannia*'s regions, with each wedge in the pie charts representing the proportion of pollen from the four major land-use types: woodland, arable, improved pasture, and unimproved pasture. If we take woodland in the Central Province, for example, Figure 9.4 indicates that that there was relatively little tree pollen in both the Roman and the early medieval periods, compared to the South East that was both more wooded than the Central Province in both periods and saw a greater increase in the amount of tree pollen in the early medieval

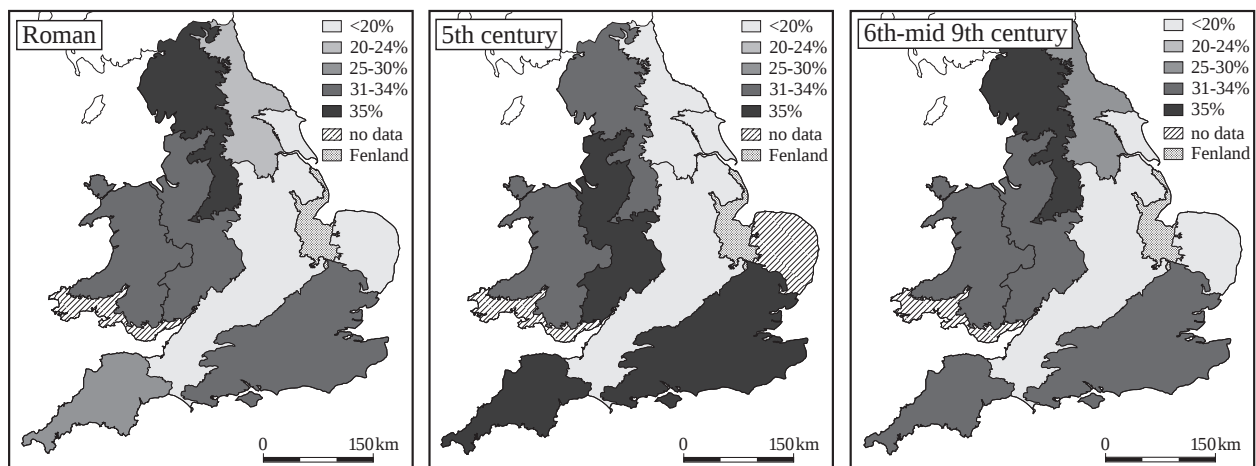
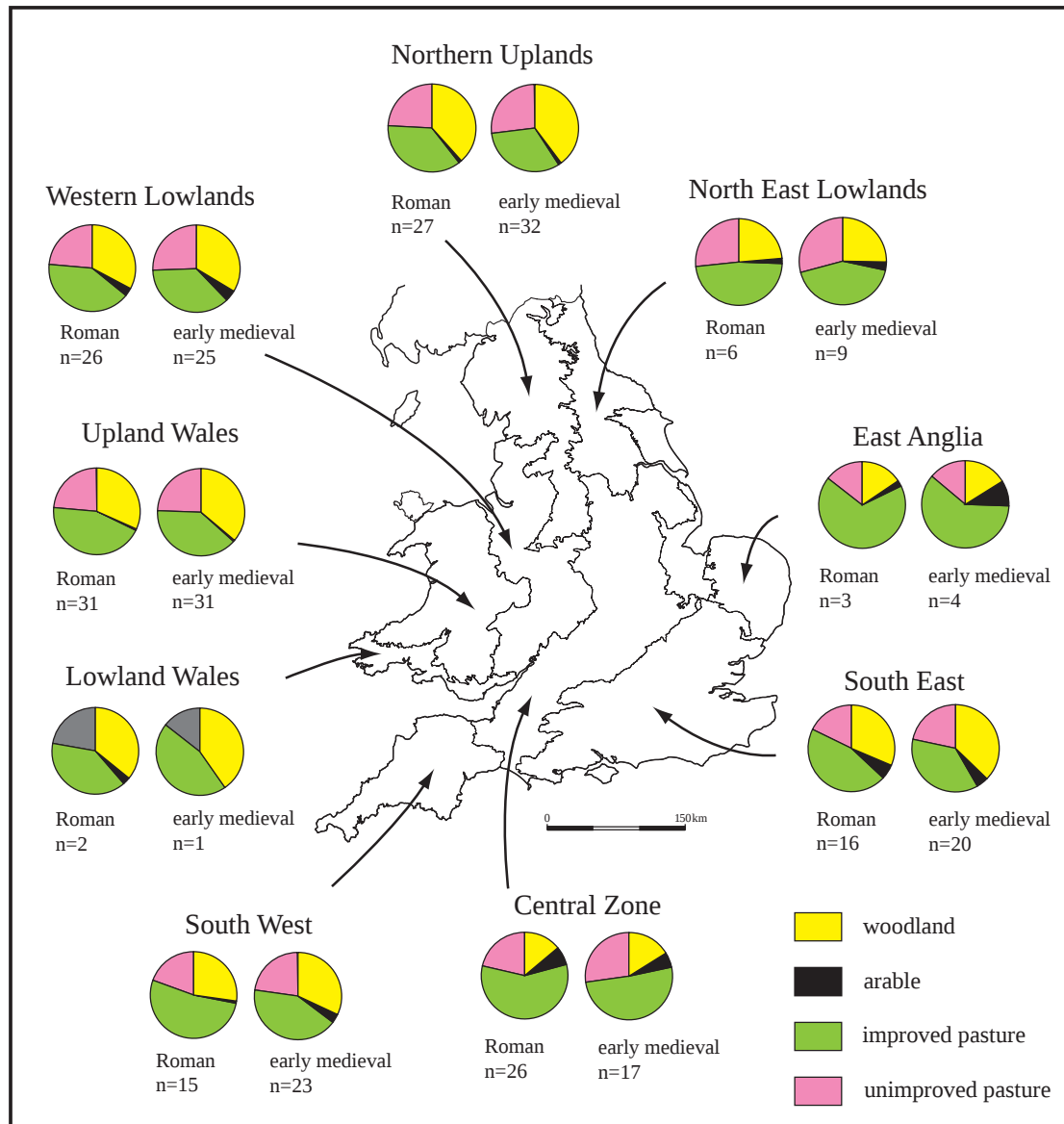


Figure 9.4 Pollen evidence for temporal and spatial variation in land-use across Britain (south of Hadrian's Wall) in the Roman and early medieval periods

period. It should be stressed that these pie charts show the proportions of the ‘Total Land Pollen’ coming from each of the four land-use groups, and since different plants produce different amounts of pollen so these proportions do *not* equate to the physical amounts of the landscape that were put down to particular land-uses (for example, an acre of trees produces far more pollen than an acre of arable crops). But what they do show are *relative differences* between regions, such as the South East being more wooded than the Central Province. It should also be noted that Figure 9.4 is, like Figure 9.3, a regional summary of data from various discrete districts whose character varied considerably, and as more data become available so we should gain a more refined mapping of land-use in each period, and of land-use change over time. In the lower part of Figure 9.4 these pollen data are presented in another way, with maps showing the proportions of pollen from the woodland land-use type in the Roman period, in the fifth century, and between the sixth to mid-ninth centuries. The evidence suggests that the Central Province and East Anglia were the most extensively cleared of woodland in the Roman and the early medieval periods; this is notable because these are the same regions that seem to have had seen the greatest potential continuity in field systems from the Roman through to the early medieval period (Figure 9.3). While most regions generally saw very little increase in tree pollen during the early medieval period, the lowland area that saw the greatest rise was the South East, although the percentage increase is admittedly so small that even here there cannot have been a widespread woodland regeneration.

Anglo-Saxons and Britons in the Landscape: The Evidence of Names

The combined evidence from the relationship between late Romano-British and medieval field systems and the pollen evidence reveals that the countryside across large parts of lowland Britain was not abandoned at the end of the Roman period, but was instead maintained in some form of agricultural use which prevented widespread woodland regeneration. Whether there was also demographic continuity is, however, less easy to determine. Much discussion has been generated over who was buried within ‘Anglo-Saxon’ cemeteries, but that debate will hopefully be moved on through ongoing developments in the scientific analysis of skeletal material. Many scholars have drawn on place-name evidence to support the view that Anglo-Saxon colonisation was widespread. It was noticeable that at the major conference in 2004 examining *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England* – an event which began with the question of ‘whether or not there were many Britons within Anglo-Saxon England’ (Higham 2007b, 1) – a good number of contributors (particularly linguists) rejected the notion of any significant British survival in lowland Britain, showing that many scholars still

stubbornly adhere to the traditional view. We can attempt to tackle this question further here by employing a case study centred on a common place-name element thought to be associated with the Anglo-Saxon immigrants: *-ingas*. The evidence deployed below can hopefully help disprove the notion that the language of landscape can be a guide to the ethnic origins of its occupants.

Names in *-ingas* and *-inga-* appear as a common feature of the landscapes of eastern England (Fig. 9.5), although comparison with Figure 9.1B shows that they are far more widespread than the actual archaeological evidence for fifth- to sixth-century Anglo-Saxon colonisation – in the form of cemeteries and *Grubenhäuser* – occurring, for example, in large numbers on the claylands of the northern Thames Basin. This in itself is not a new observation, and indeed it led Dodgson (1966) to propose that instead of representing the *initial* phase of Anglo-Saxon settlement, they are evidence of a later phase. The interpretation of *-ingas* names may, however, be less straightforward than this and it is suggested here that rather than being associated with a new ethnic group – i.e. Anglo-Saxon colonisation in the traditional sense – they actually simply relate to the naming of early ‘folk territories’ by people using the Old English language, irrespective of who was living there. Note that in this study the term ‘folk territory’ is used for discrete areas of landscape occupied by a community that possessed a distinct identity, and which in Anglo-Saxon documents are sometimes referred to as *pagi* or *regiones*.

Reconstructing Early Folk Territories

Place-names such as *-ingas* are thought to indicate the territory belonging to a particular social or folk group: hence Barling in south-east Essex is recorded as *Bærlingum* in 998 (Sawyer 1968, S.1522) and *Berlings* in 1042×66 (S.1056), meaning ‘the Bærlingas, the people called after Bærel or Bærle’, being derived from the Old English folk-name **Bærlingas* (that includes the personal name **Bærel* or **Bærle*) and *ingas* (Watts 2004, 36). In addition to place-name evidence, a wide range of other sources can be used to reconstruct early medieval folk territories (see Rippon 2012, chapter 8, for a fuller discussion). Other place-names can indicate that two territorial units were once one (e.g. Higher and Lower X), while what by the sixteenth century was a parish church may once have been a chapelry of a nearby mother church – a possible indication of the latter’s former minster status. The relationship between parish boundaries and the physical fabric of the historic landscape is particularly informative: more ancient units tend to have boundaries that follow equally ancient features in the landscape (such as the long, sinuous field-boundaries that run along many watersheds), whereas the boundaries of more recent entities tend to zig-zag through field systems creating complex patterns, including one parish having detached parcels in another (an arrangement that might

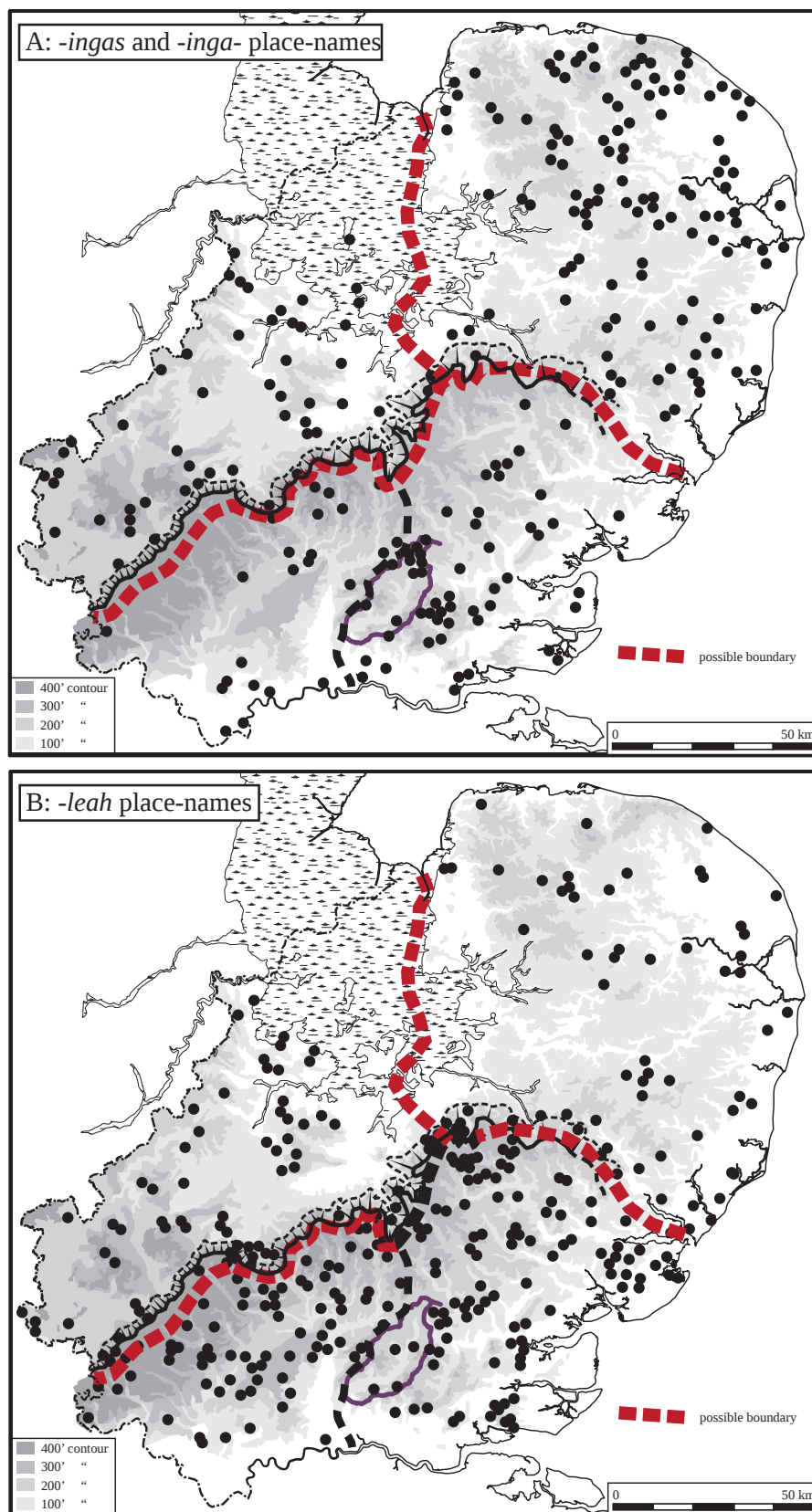


Figure 9.5 The distribution of -ingas and -inga- place-names (after Dodgson 1966, fig. 1), and wood-pasture and woodland indicative *lēah* place-names (after Williamson 2003, fig. 20)

also be created where former common grazing was divided between two newly separated communities).

‘The Greater Rodings’

A well-known example of an *-ingas* name is the group of eight parishes and 16 Domesday manors and other land-holdings called Roding, located in western Essex, derived from the Old English folk-name **Hrōthingas*, ‘the people called after Hrotha’ (Watts 2004, 505). These parishes lie either side of the River Roding (Figs 9.1 and 9.6–9.7), the name of which is a back-projection from the folk-name, since in the eleventh century it was the *Angricesburne* (‘the stream of Angric, Ongar Stream’: Watts 2004, 505). Bassett (1997, 25) has previously suggested that the Rodings represent a *regio* of ‘an early Anglo-Saxon community whose name they all perpetuated’, although there are two problems with this hypothesis: firstly, while the Rodings do form a coherent block of landscape, a case can be made for Bassett having under-estimated the extent of the early folk territory on its southern side; and, secondly, while the place-name is Old English there is virtually no other evidence for Anglo-Saxon colonisation in this district, which raises the possibility that it was occupied by a community of native British descent.

That the Rodings may have been part of a far more extensive early folk territory is suggested by a wider examination of the landscape. To the west, north and east, the Roding parishes are contained within a long, sinuous field boundary that mostly follows high ground (e.g. the eastern boundary of Berners Roding on Fig. 9.6A). *Within the Rodings*, however, all the parish boundaries zig-zag through – and so must post-date – existing fields, likely denoting that they are relatively recent compared to the more ancient, sinuous watershed boundaries that enclose the Rodings on three sides. To the south, however, the boundary of Berners and Beauchamp Rodings with Willingale Doe similarly zig-zag through the historic landscape (Fig. 9.6B) and are clearly relatively recent. Willingale Doe is one of two small parishes (Willingale Doe and Willingale Spain), that are separated by Shellow Bowell (Figs 9.6A and B); the inter-fingering of these three parishes and numerous detached parcels clearly suggests that they were once part of a single ‘Willingale’ territory (Fig. 9.7A). The southern edge of Willingale Spain, by contrast, follows a long sinuous field boundary which may have originally marked the southern edge of a territory comprising the Rodings and the Willingales (with Shellow Bowels; Fig. 9.7B). It is likely that White Roding was the central place of this territory: it was the largest parish, sometimes prefixed ‘Magna’ (Great) (Reaney 1935, 494), was the only Roding held by the King in Domesday (*DBEss* 1,8; probably Kingston Farm), and was by far the most highly valued church in the Taxation of Pope Nicholas in 1291 (Bassett 1997, 29–30). Two curiosities are that the Roding parishes were split between

Dunmow Hundred to the north and Ongar Hundred to the south, and that Roding Morrell, a hamlet in the north of White Roding, was a detached part of Ongar Hundred (VCH *Ess* IV, 4; see below), although this probably reflects the late date at which the Hundreds of Essex were created (Boyden 1986).

Greater Ongar

The ‘greater Rodings’ territory is, in fact, just one of a series of similar large valley-based units in the Roding valley, that together make up the rest of Ongar Hundred. One of these is ‘greater Ongar’. To the south of Willingale Spain lies a large detached parcel of High Ongar parish that was generated when Norton Mandeville, a chapelry of High Ongar of the 1180s, was elevated to parochial status (VCH *Ess* IV, 172); the place-name ‘Norton’ suggests that this was the ‘North Farm’ of Ongar. High Ongar parish had a second, substantial, detached parcel on the western side of the River Roding that included High Ongar Farm and the northern part of Ongar Great Park (see below), the rest of which lies in Stanford Rivers. The parish of Stanford Rivers as mapped in the nineteenth century is, however, larger than it was before c. 1280 when it was enlarged to take in the area north of the Wash Brook (that includes Toot Hill) which left High Ongar Farm as a detached parcel (VCH *Ess* IV, 182–183). When the extent of High Ongar is reconstructed on the eve of this change it curved around Bobbingworth, Greensted, Shelley and Chipping Ongar in a way which would imply that at some earlier date these four parishes were carved out of High Ongar (Fig. 9.7A). As the boundaries between Bobbingworth, Shelley, Fyfield, Moreton (which had a detached parcel in High Ongar), Stondon Massey² and Kelvedon Hatch all zig-zag through the historic landscape, they too were probably part of this ‘greater Ongar’ territory (Fig. 9.7B). The central place of this territory should have been High Ongar, described as a ‘mother church’ in 1210 (Secker 2013, 89). Chipping Ongar was clearly carved out of High Ongar, while the hundredal meeting place was at Toot Hill (VCH *Ess* IV, 155). The importance of Ongar is also reflected in the high value ascribed to its church (Secker 2013, 89) and in the nearby Ongar deer park which is documented in the will of Thurstan (dated 1043x1045; VCH *Ess* IV, 159; Whitelock 1930, 83; Hart 1971, No. 59; Rackham 1986, fig. 6.2).

An Anglo-Saxon or British regio?

Ongar Hundred, as documented in Domesday, seems to have been the rump of a once larger territory that included the ‘greater Rodings’, ‘greater Ongar’, ‘greater Laver’ (that included High Laver, Lower Laver, Magdalen Laver and North Weald Bassett), and the parishes to the south west that were enclosed by two long, sinuous boundaries that ran through the unenclosed commons that capped

both watersheds of the Roding Valley. The various linked place-names (e.g. Stapleford Tawney and Stapleford Abbots; Theydon Mount, Theydon Gardon, and Theydon Bois), along with parish boundaries that zig-zag though the historic landscape (sometimes cutting diagonally across fields), all point to these south-western parishes having been a fourth sub-division of the Roding Valley *regio* (Fig. 9.7B).

The Anglo-Saxon place-names, including *ingas*, would lead many to assume that this area – at the heart of the East Saxon kingdom – was occupied by an immigrant Anglo-Saxon community but no evidence exists for this whatsoever. Essex is a county that features a large number of identified Anglo-Saxon settlements (many including *Grubenhäuser*) and cemeteries, although these are far from evenly spread across the landscape, in fact being restricted to southern and eastern coastal districts. Extensive surveys and excavations on the inland Boulder Clay areas have failed to produce any evidence for such Anglo-Saxon colonisation (see note 1); and nor have these inland areas produced many antiquarian finds of Anglo-Saxon metalwork, the single example from the Roding Valley being a spearhead of late sixth- or seventh-century date (Ess HER 16850), which obviously post-dates the migration period. The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) has recorded 750 finds (of all periods) from the Roding Valley *regio*, showing that responsible metal detectorists who report their finds are working in the area, but there is not a single fifth- to sixth-century Anglo-Saxon artefact.³ New, and surprising, discoveries are always being made, but such has been the scale of antiquarian observation across Essex, recent archaeological survey and excavation, and PAS reporting that this absence of evidence for early Anglo-Saxon occupation within the Roding Valley must surely be taken as reliable *negative* evidence for minimal Anglo-Saxon activity in this *regio*. Coupled with the fact that this had been a zone with dense Romano-British occupation (see Fig. 9.1A) but one with relatively few woodland-indicative *-leah* place-names (that are now thought to be indicative of wood-pasture: Hooke 2008; Fig. 9.5), so it is highly likely that this area continued to be occupied and farmed by the native British population.

Climate Change: A Factor in Shaping Landscape Character during the Fifth and Sixth Centuries?

Just as archaeologists have questioned the traditional orthodoxy that change within society was brought about by migration, so they have become sceptical about early ideas suggesting that environmental factors determined human behaviour – a view once prevalent in both the prehistoric and historic periods (e.g. Postan 1972; Beresford 1975; Burgess 1985). While crude ‘environmental determinism’ was rejected by landscape archaeologists long ago (see Wright 1976 for an early rebuttal), in recent years there have been new, more subtle considerations of how geology and topography may have shaped the settlements and field systems of early

medieval England (e.g. Williamson 2003, 2013; although see Lowerre 2015 for a critical assessment) and the character of Romano-British and medieval agriculture (Rippon 2012a; Rippon *et al.* 2014, 2015). Notable also is the growing academic interest in past climate change, although alongside this is a worrying tendency within modern climate science to make simplistic correlations between observed trends in temperature and precipitation on the one hand, and changes within society on the other (see, for example, van Geel *et al.* 2004; Turney *et al.* 2006, 2016). Thus, while Klimenko (2016, 365) plots fluctuations in temperature in north-eastern Europe based upon tree-ring, pollen, lake sediment and historical data, he draws overly crude correlations with documented historical events, arguing that ‘it is virtually certain that the mode and speed of development and north eastward expansion of the Russian State from the Middle Ages to the Modern Time were in many ways dependent on natural and geographical factors’.

Such views have been challenged within the palaeoenvironmental community (e.g. Coombes and Barber 2005) and Middleton (2012, 268), for example, has argued that ‘palaeoclimatic studies have already profoundly impacted the study of collapse and culture change, and a new determinism is in evidence’. Reconstruction by Buntgen *et al.* of summer temperatures, for example, does indeed appear to show a decline from the mid-sixth through to the mid-seventh centuries, but we should question whether this did really constitute a ‘Late Antique Little Ice Age’ that was a contributing factor ‘to the establishment of the Justinian Plague, transformation of the Eastern Roman Empire, and collapse of the Sasanian empire’ (2016, 231). There are various reasons why not, most notably that most climate change data come from very high upland areas (such as the European Alps and Russian Altai-Sayan Mountains) that will not reflect patterns in the lowlands where the impact of changes in climate will have been far less significant (for example in having a far longer growing season such that falls in temperature will not have curtailed agriculture to the same extent as in upland areas). Historians have also jumped on this climate change band-wagon, such as Ellenblum’s *The Collapse of the Eastern Mediterranean* (2012) which argues for ‘a series of well-documented climatic disasters that altered the face of the eastern Mediterranean in the mid eleventh century’ and which led to ‘the physical decline of some of the most important civilisations and cultural centres of the time’. Reviews of this work suggest grave concerns over the uncritical assessment of source material, as well as a general scepticism of the arguments put forward (e.g. Frankopa 2012; Burke 2013). Along similar lines, Cheyett (2008, 127) argues that ‘since reversion from arable to pasture affected regions as far apart as Italy and Poland it cannot simply be ascribed to the political and fiscal dislocation of the ancient world, but should be understood as one effect of the climatic anomaly’, yet the failure here

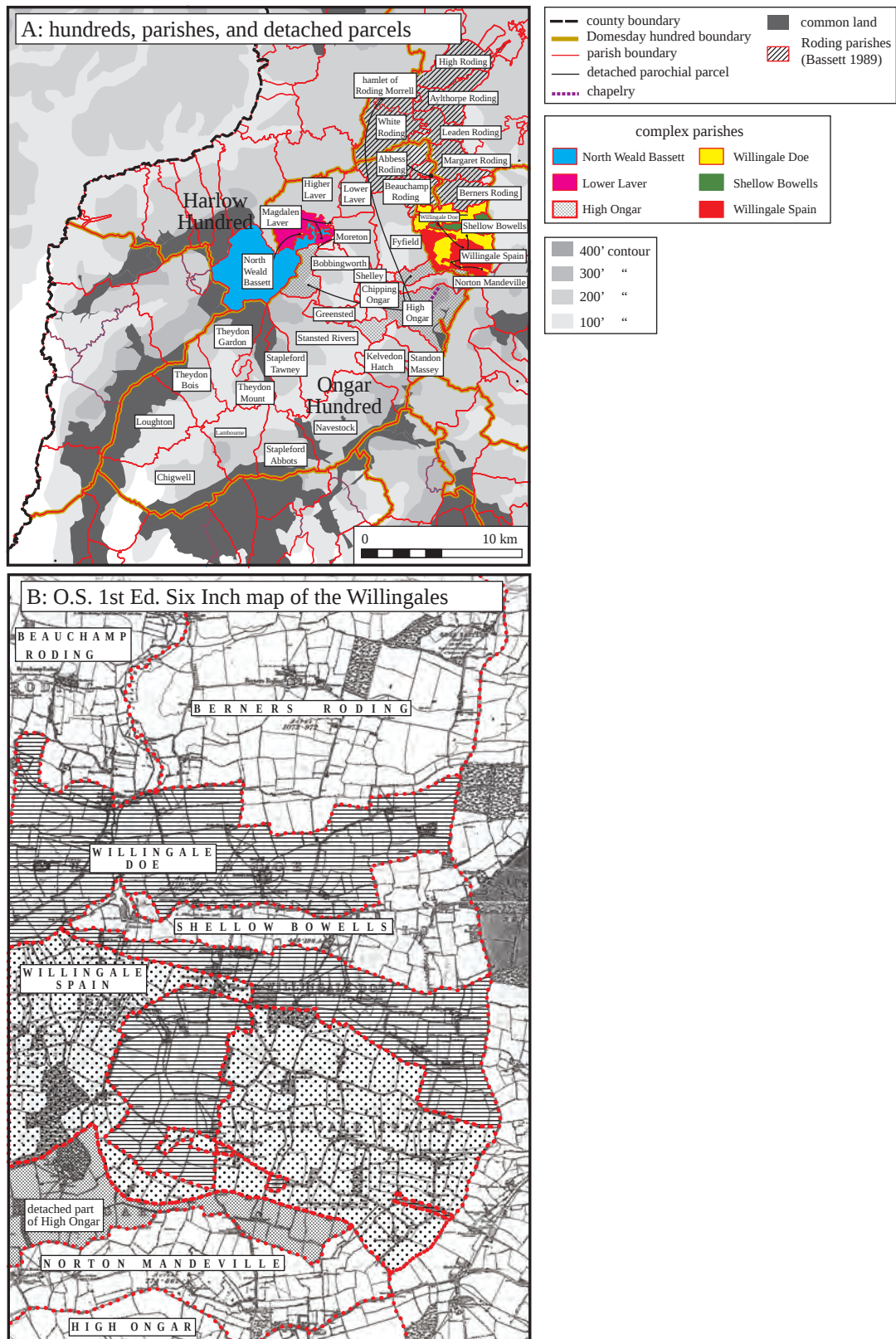


Figure 9.6 Evidence for the Roding Valley early folk territory: (A) hundred and parish boundaries, and detached parcels; (B) Ordnance Survey First Edition Six Inch map of the Willingales, showing the relationships between the complex parish boundaries and the historic landscape

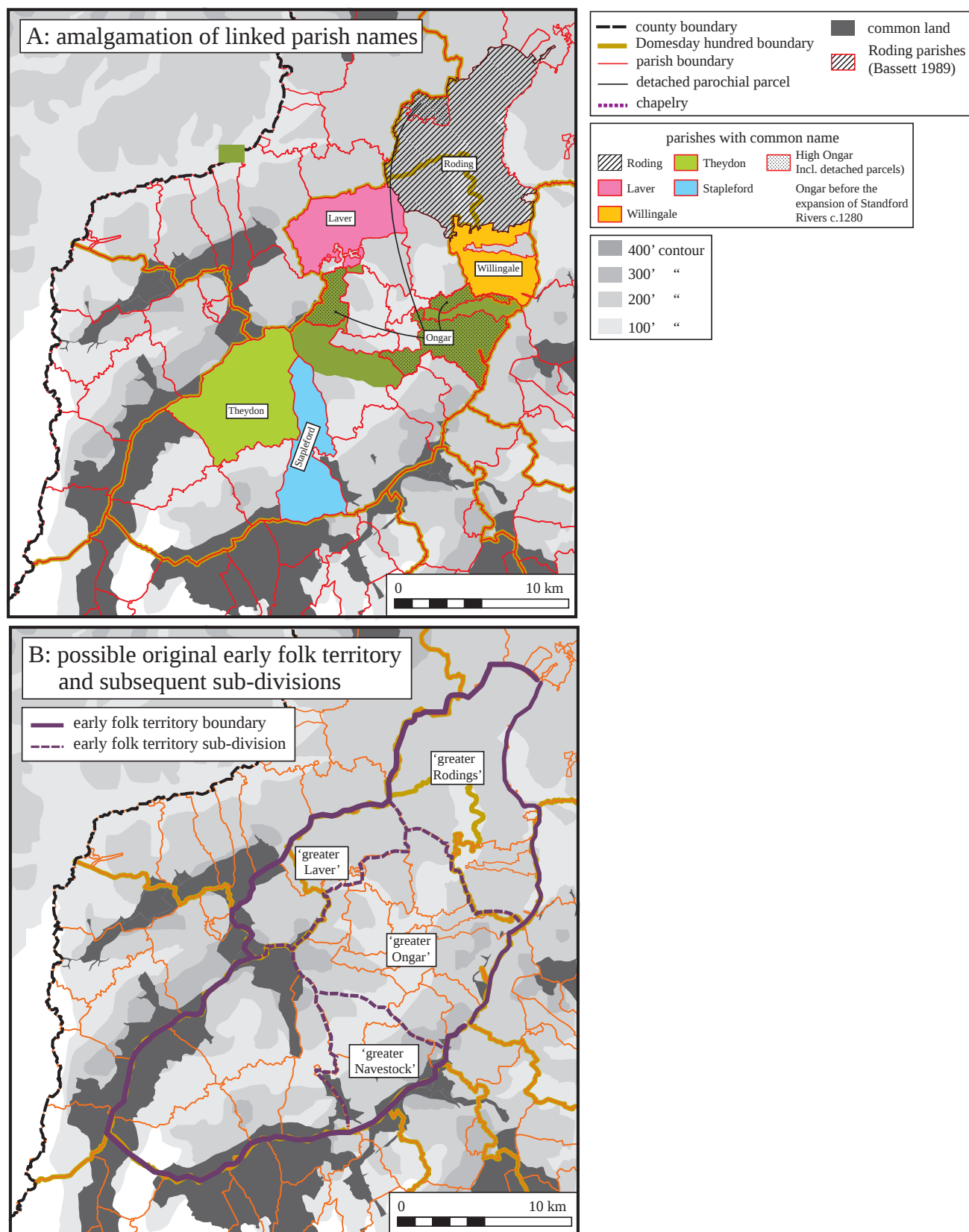


Figure 9.7 Evidence for the Roding Valley early folk territory: (A) the amalgamation of parishes with shared names; (B) the possible early folk territory and its initial sub-divisions

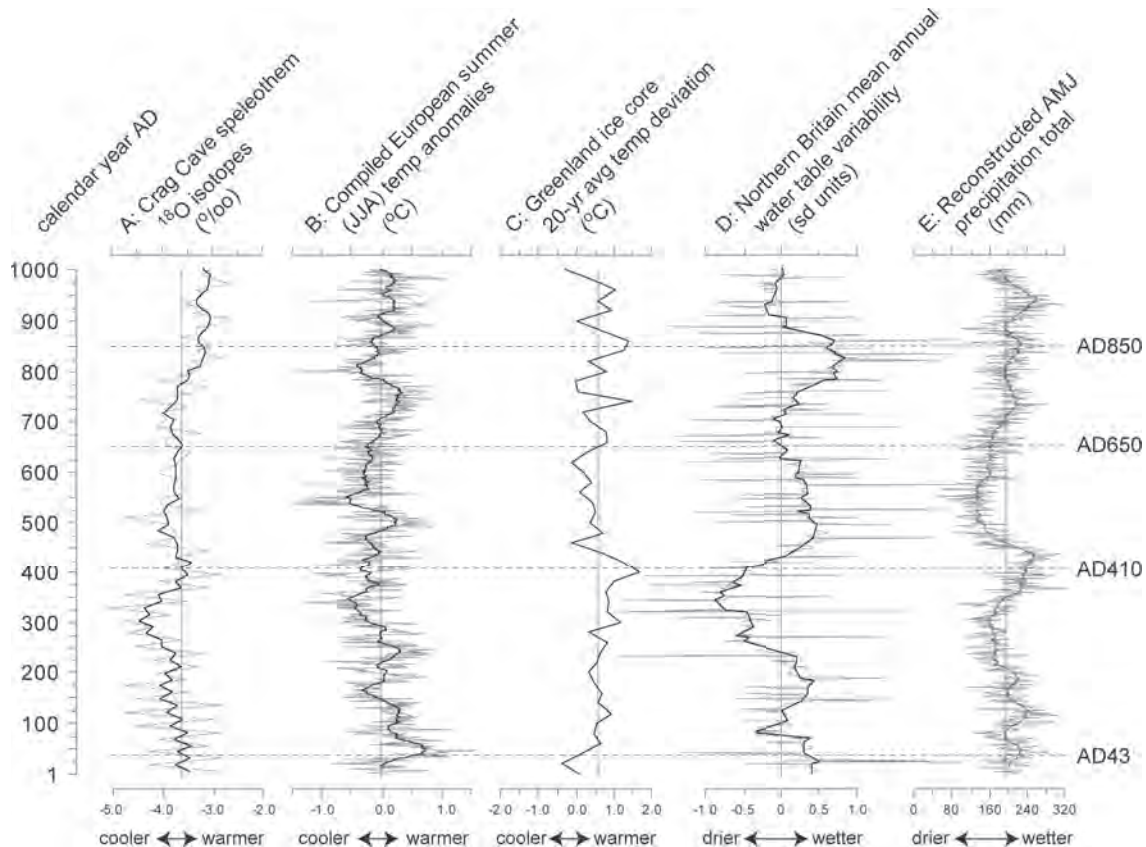


Figure 9.8 Selected palaeoclimatic proxies for climate change during the first millennium AD. The Crag Cave speleothem indicates palaeo-temperature, while the Northern Britain watertable variability is a palaeo-precipitation record. Values for the compiled European summer temperature and Greenland ice core record are expressed as anomalies from the twentieth-century average. Vertical lines indicate the first millennium AD average (sources: A: McDermott et al. 2001; B: Luterbacher et al. 2016; C: Vinther et al. 2009; D: Charman et al. 2006; E: Büntgen et al. 2011) (drawn by Ralph Fyfe)

to engage with the primary evidence for land-use – tellingly, just a single pollen diagram is discussed – or to account for the wide range of evidence for continuities in the landscape, means that this paper likewise fails to convince.

Another issue is that it should not be assumed that because data are ‘scientific’ they are always accurate; they may be but they must be understood in the context of their study, and their scale and quality must always be fully assessed. While reconstructions of past climate used to be based on scarce and very indirect evidence – mostly documentary references (e.g. Lamb 1982) – modern techniques use a range of proxies such as changes in the widths of tree-rings and plant/animal remains preserved within sequences of upland peat that indicate the degree of wetness. There are, however, many problems: these palaeoclimate reconstructions rely upon analysing deposits at intervals that can be many decades or even centuries apart, and the material employed to reconstruct climate may not in itself be datable which means that radiocarbon dates have to be used and these themselves are only accurate to a hundred years or so. Overall, many of the climatic trends that have been reconstructed are very poorly dated, which in a period with precise historical dates makes correlation extremely difficult. Another problem is

that the analysis of one particular data-set will give one set of proxy climate indicators from one area, but that does not mean that those data can then be applied to a far wider region. Indeed, in practice, a comparison of data from different areas, and using different types of proxy, produces a confusing picture of variability.

Figure 9.8 brings together a range of recent palaeo-environmental data compilations that describe climatic fluctuations during the first millennium AD. While there are significant challenges in drawing together such a diagram, including dating, discrepancies between data sets, and the diverse – usually marginal – places from where data are obtained, it at least summarises the current position. Charman *et al.* (2006) brought together bog-surface wetness records derived from testate amoebae assemblages from ombrotrophic (i.e. rain-fed) peatlands across northern Britain that allow changes in precipitation to be determined, with key periods of increased wetness observed in the mid-fourth and eighth centuries AD. These compare to raised lake levels in the Alps between 150–250 cal. AD and 650–850 cal. AD (see Magny 2004), and oxygen isotopes from Sphagnum cellulose from Walton Moss in northern England (Daley *et al.* 2010), that show broadly the same

trends. While there is some correspondence with inferred rainfall in central Europe, differences are also apparent, such as showing that the later fifth century was a period of continued increased wetness in Britain but one of decreased precipitation in mainland Europe (Fig. 9.8E).

These northern British wet/dry periods superficially appear to correspond to the periods of warmer and cooler summer temperatures identified through oxygen isotopes from a speleothem (stalagmite) in south-west Ireland (McDermott *et al.* 2001) (Fig. 9.8A), and in a synthesis of a wide range of proxy records from across mainland Europe (Luterbacher *et al.* 2016) (Fig. 9.8B). The picture that emerges in Britain is that the fourth century AD became cooler and wetter, and while it now appears that this was a period of declining population, it seems unlikely that there was a causal link. The decline in population – as evidenced by the recently published extensive survey of Romano-British rural settlement – was not synchronous across Britain (Smith *et al.* 2016), and the regions where the fall was most marked, such as the South East, were lowland areas where a small change in temperature will have had its most limited impact. Although Büntgen *et al.* (2011) have linked the movement of barbarian groups in the Migration Period in Europe to temperature and precipitation changes, it is clear that that these climatic shifts and the pronounced deterioration that has been widely recognised that started with the major volcanic eruption of AD 536, had no discernible impact in Britain, as temperatures and precipitation were broadly stable from the start of the sixth century. It is noticeable, however, that the period of economic expansion during the ‘long eighth century’ did correspond to a period of warmer and wetter conditions, even if the relationship between the two is unclear. This period also saw the emergence of stable kingship, the Christian Church, a revival in international trade, and the replacement of folk territories (and their strongly communal patterns of agriculture) with new estate structures: it is difficult to see how all these will have been caused by gradual, and slight, changes in climate.

Conclusions

The end of Roman Britain is traditionally seen as a significant phase in the history of our landscape and society, but traditional debates have been from a Roman or an Anglo-Saxon perspective which inevitably leads to the impression of discontinuity in the early fifth century. The extent and character of the Anglo-Saxon migrations have been much debated, but the neglected dimension is the extent of regional variation in the scale of the colonisation. When viewed at a national scale, Anglo-Saxon settlements and cemeteries appear to have been liberally scattered across most of southern and eastern England, but when individual regions are examined more closely the picture becomes complex: there are some areas which have seen considerable archaeological survey and excavation, and

which have revealed prehistoric, Romano-British, and later medieval occupation, but where there is almost no actual evidence for Anglo-Saxons. If we discount the wholesale abandonment landscapes, this leaves open the potential for the survival of a substantial British population in some (if not all) regions. There are clear discontinuities at the end of the Roman period, although these will have had the greatest effect on the higher echelons of society: the land-owning and urban classes whose prosperity was most tightly associated with the money-based market economy. In many areas of the countryside, in contrast, the disappearance of taxation and collapse of the market economy will have led to a decline in the intensity of agriculture – as there was no longer a need to produce a food surplus – yet life will otherwise have carried on. Indeed, the great advantage of studying the landscape as a whole is that one gets to see the bigger picture, and in particular what was going on within the wider countryside. Data collected in *The Fields of Britannia* project indicate that there was far more potential continuity within the landscape than previously thought, although this varied from region to region. This continuity is seen both in areas that appear to have witnessed a significant Anglo-Saxon migration (such as East Anglia and the Central Zone), and those that did not (such as inland areas of the northern Thames Basin).

Studying landscape at a broad scale is good for providing the ‘big picture’, but, in order to fill in the details, one needs to study specific places. The example explored here was of a landscape characterised by Old English place-names – and in particular *-ingas* – but one lacking archaeological evidence for Anglo-Saxon immigration. Instead, the integration of a wide range of source material suggests that an extensive valley-based territory was occupied by a community of British descent.

In addition to the issue of how native Britons and immigrant Anglo-Saxon communities interacted, another factor influencing landscape history will have been the role of environmental factors. This is, however, fraught with difficulties and an emerging challenge is to prevent a new paradigm of environmental determinism as climate scientists seek simplistic correlations between their often poorly dated evidence for climatic change, mostly taken from physically extremely marginal environments, and socio-economic trends seen in the archaeological and documentary record. Overall, the fourth to sixth centuries should be clearly recognised as a crucial period in the history of landscape and society in Britain as elsewhere, and one in which scholars from both humanities and science backgrounds need to work more closely together.

Notes

- 1 For example, the claylands around Bedford (Timby *et al.* 2007b; Simmonds and Welsh 2013; Luke 2016, 2018); the claylands west of Cambridge (Abrams and Ingham 2008; Ingham 2008, 2010; Wright *et al.* 2009); the claylands of north-western Essex (Havis and Brooks 2004; Barber 2006; Ennis 2006; Roberts

- 2007; Timby *et al.* 2007a; Cooke *et al.* 2009; Patten 2012; Wolfram-Murray and Chapman 2015); and the claylands on the Chiltern dip-slope in Hertfordshire (Stansbie *et al.* 2012).
- 2 Stondon Massey is not in the Domesday Book: its name is derived from the Marci family who certainly held it in 1238, and it may have been part of Kelvedon Hatch which, at the time of Domesday, was held by Ralph de Marcy (VCH Ess IV, 242; Watts 2004, 580).
 - 3 In Essex as a whole there are 17,338 artefacts in the PAS database of which 78 are fifth- to sixth-century AD date (<https://finds.org.uk/>).

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Diversity in Unity: Exploring Survival, Transition and Ethnogenesis in Late Antique Western Britain

Roger White

Introduction

The beginning and end-points are clear at least. In AD 400 the province of *Britannia* was, as far as we can tell, a fully embedded and largely still functioning part of the Roman Empire. Four hundred years later, King Offa had established a Roman-style barrier between two new peoples – the English and the Welsh – and other British identities had emerged, including the Cornish in the south-west of England. These are our fixed, and accepted, points; the question is how did we get from one to the other? What is argued or disputed is not so much the end-point, but the speed of the transition from a Roman past to an English future within this 400-year long period and why this transition occurred in some places and not others. This paper makes the case for viewing the western half of Britain as following a fundamentally different trajectory from the eastern half, especially so in relation to what became during this period ‘England’. The evidence base for this will not be rehearsed in detail here for reasons of space, and most of the data have been laid out elsewhere, with Guy Halsall’s account (2013) being the most recent historical assessment. In seeking to understand why the west took a different trajectory to the east of Britain we cannot cite a vast gulf in material culture as a reason. As Ward-Perkins has argued, the collapse of material culture and Roman styles of life was relatively swift over the course of the fifth century throughout the Western Empire (2005, 124–137), so we cannot point to a wide disparity of cultural material between the successor states. Again, it is not my purpose to refute or debate these points in detail; rather, I will focus on the mechanisms that might have prompted the emergence of these entities. Why is it that the people of the west of the island of Britain followed a route to a different ethnic identity than did the people of the east? That they did so is uncontested, but understanding *why* they felt it

necessary to take this route is not widely discussed, despite its fundamental importance.

For those living in the east of the island, we have the contested issue of the scale of the Anglo-Saxon migration(s). Current thinking tends towards significant numbers (Halsall 2013, 103–113; see Rippon, this volume), yet it is also clear from landscape continuity which demonstrates an ongoing cultivation, and thus habitation, of much of the Romano-British agricultural landscape (see the excellent survey in Rippon *et al.* 2015; Rippon, this volume). The implication of this must be that there must also have been a widespread assimilation of the native people with the incoming Germanic-speaking population groups, with the resulting fusion of these elements (whose pace and take-up necessarily varied regionally) creating an identity that we recognise as English. Their compatriots in the western part of the island seemingly made a different set of choices which rejected the newly emergent English identity in favour of creating their own. The reasons they did so is the focus of this paper.

The Demise of Roman Britain

The currently accepted paradigm, first crystallised by Simon Esmonde Cleary in his *The Ending of Roman Britain* (1989), views change within Roman Britain as being well underway by the mid-fourth century, and certainly by its last quarter, with an apparently rapid and effectively complete collapse of the imperial apparatus of government within the early decades of the fifth century (Esmonde Cleary 2016 offers a more recent synthesis). This model is based on consideration of the archaeology and through comparison with what was happening within the same timeframe on the near continent where historical and archaeological evidence for survival of

a diminished but still functioning Roman State is still seen across much of the fifth century, alongside some evidence for economic activity such as the continued production of Argonne Ware (Esmonde Cleary 2013a, 424–426). There has been growing evidence (and some acceptance) that the mechanisms of the Roman economy and State did continue in Britain for longer than the earliest fifth century. The coin evidence (Walton and Moorhead 2016, 844–845) certainly seems to point that way, while evidence for some ongoing economic activity such as pottery production is also accepted (Gerrard 2014); but the survival or continuity in the functions of government is much less clearly established. Evidence of urban activity in the towns of Silchester (Fulford *et al.* 2006, 273–285) and Verulamium (Niblett 2001, 127–140), for example, seems to extend into the fifth century (although the archaeology is disputed: see Neal 2003), perhaps as pockets of Roman activity within an increasingly Germanic sea (cf Christie 2011, 212–213; Dark 2000, 58–104). The rationale for this survival perhaps lies in the belief of the people at the time that Roman imperial power would be re-asserted, as had happened at the end of the third century following the hiatus of the ‘Gallic Empire’ and the revolts of Carausius and Allectus (Casey 1994, 140–152). Realisation of the reality of the permanence of Britain’s loss from the Empire may only have come gradually, becoming certain only by the AD 430s or 440s when the crisis on the continent will have made the fragility of Roman power in the West evident (Halsall 2013, 254). If this is an accurate summary then this would account for the ongoing signs of Roman life into the fifth century, particularly in urban centres where Roman elites retained a residue of power, wealth and authority to maintain their position for a time, perhaps also through alliance with the Church (see discussion below). As this model can be applied universally across the late Roman provinces of *Britannia*, so the divergence must have begun after this time, in the second half of the fifth century and into the sixth (cf Christie 2011, 211–215).

A Question of Identity

Since the major change in the post-Roman period is ultimately a question of a change in identity, consequent formation of new states and powers, and ultimately ethnogenesis, consideration needs to be given to what identity/identities people had in later Roman *Britannia* while this was still a fully functioning part of the Roman Empire, and how that identity was maintained, modified or replaced/dropped in later times.

The question of identity has, of course, been much debated recently in the context of Roman Britain, perhaps replacing Romanisation as the core topic for debate (see Millett 1990; it is noticeable that in Millett *et al.* 2016, three of the papers contain ‘identity’ in their title, but none explicitly mention Romanisation). As this debate’s

participants have agreed, there can be no single set identity; identity is, by its nature, fluid, multiple, negotiable and contested (Nesbitt 2016, 231–233). For David Mattingly, it is a ‘discrepant’ experience – a term that offers something of the uncomfortable nature of the negotiation of the multiple identities existing at the time. At a broad level, however, one can recognise a number of communities within late Roman Britain, and in the wider Empire, that reflect both the recognised realities of the time, such as the legal distinction between *honestiores* and *humiliores*, the long-standing separation between civilian and military, and the difference of belief and allegiance between pagans and Christians (2006, 17–19). In these pairings we see immediately how these groups would overlap: one could be a poor Christian woman sharing the beliefs of a fantastically rich and powerful individual such as Melania the Younger (Brown 2012, 17), but experiencing nothing of the degree of wealth that the latter held; or a soldier such as St Martin of Tours catapulted into the hierarchy of the church, whose largely aristocratic members found his dishevelled appearance and lack of polish distasteful (Matthews 1975, 146–172). Such knowledge means that we have to accept that we cannot achieve neat distinctions of identity and that the multiplicity of identity groups within society, especially during times of stress and change, will be impossible to construct in detail as they would have been an ever-changing kaleidoscope of identities (Halsall 2007, 35–62).

Given this uncertainty, how can we begin to understand how ethnic identities might have changed in this time? Taking as a given people’s familial and religious identities, what other social identities can we imagine? In the absence of hard evidence in the form of documents or inscriptions, hypothesis has to fill the gaps, with all its concomitant uncertainties. One can suggest perhaps three aspects of identity among the majority in society that help to determine ethnic identity. First, an identity as a member of a community in a locale, be it urban or rural, from which one knows most people and draws upon this in most everyday social relationships. Second, an identity as part of a larger grouping, equivalent to regional, that is expressed in awareness of a geographical area that one is connected to by economic, social, religious or other ties and where one would expect to fit in socially through commonalities of language, custom and other aspects of societal behaviour. Third would be the equivalent of a national identity. At this level, identity becomes much more abstract: the concept of a ‘Roman’ identity, for instance, or one pertaining in the context of the Roman Empire to the wider connections of the elite across the Empire, expressed through concepts such as *otium* (James 1999, 68–77; Halsall 2007, 38–40). Each of these three levels of identity is united by one factor: it is always formed in opposition to something. Indeed, it only becomes necessary to define identity when stress in society, such as the pressure for land or for water resources

or competition for wealth or status, or wider politico-military insecurity, generate problems in society that need to be resolved, often by the identification, and exclusion of groups perceived as 'other' (James 1999, 74–75).

Additionally, one should consider ranking the *strength* of identities – it is unlikely that all three of these levels of identity were perceived to be at the same strength. Roman identity might not appear to matter to most people most of the time, whereas local identity could be much more important given its closer relationship to how people lived their lives – how one got on with one's neighbours and peers will have had a much more immediate impact than who might have been governor, or even Emperor at any one time. Thus, if one imagines people living in later Roman Britain having identities at these three levels what would happen when Roman rule was removed or died away? It is probable in such a scenario that, at first, all three identity levels were relatively undisturbed by such a change – there need not have been much initial impact since people assumed Rome was bound to return. After all, maintenance to the concept of Rome may have required no more investment than expressions of devotion to the Emperor and the use of Latin when required, alongside the maintenance of duties of governance and law. In north Africa, during the Tetrarchic persecution of 303–305, all the Roman state required of its citizens was a swearing of loyalty underpinned by a sacrifice of incense and evidenced by a legal document proving the act – hardly a rigorous display of citizenship – a requirement that Frend has commented was carried out by officials 'firmly but not without tact' (Frend 1951, 4). It is telling that while some Christians felt that even this small act was too much, and chose martyrdom rather than renouncing their faith, others felt that this was within the bounds of acceptability and conformed, leading to a split later in the church between the Catholic and Donatist churches (Frend 1951). Loyalty to Rome was thus an elastic, and negotiated, concept for many. Expression of local or regional identity will have been unchanged too in the early fifth century, there being no particular threat to it unless in those areas perhaps exposed to incoming 'strangers'. As these groups grew in number through the century, however, local and regional identities, as well as other identities such as religious ones, may well have been perceived to be under threat.

In such scenarios, two possibilities exist. The first is to work upon integration of the 'other' into wider (and local) society; this is an expected path since those who have moved into the area are to a degree vulnerable, perceiving that they are reliant on the host community in many different ways to survive. Thus, the incoming population would be assimilated over time into the existing community and become part of it, perhaps changing the collective identity in subtle (and perhaps even unconscious) ways. This is a model that one can suggest pertained throughout the history of the Roman Empire; and is what Romanisation meant in practice (Nesbitt

2016; Revell 2016). This relationship between incoming and existing communities might take a different line, however, if the incoming groups were perceived by both sides to be stronger than the existing/resident one. If the incoming community could replace the ethnic identity of the host community with its own identity, particularly if it could back up this change with force which could not be countered by the host community, then it would be possible to envisage that within a relatively short span of time – a generation or two perhaps – the incoming community's identity would begin to supplant the existing one. Rapidly, in order to progress in society, one would have to adopt the new (and socially dominant) identity over the old (which is often a change that will naturally come with the generations in any case where stable conditions prevail).

Albeit crude and simplified, I would argue that these scenarios outline what appears to have happened in late to post-Roman Britain, but also in other parts of the Empire in the fifth and sixth centuries, as well as in other, more historical, times as Padel has pointed out (2007, 228–229; he refers to the parallel of European settlement of North America between 1600–1900). Ethnogenesis came through the acculturation of (residual) Romans with incoming 'barbarian' peoples or groups to create new nations/kingdoms or powers and identities; and often this was a process initiated before the end of the fifth century. In Britain's west, the genesis of the Welsh and Cornish in effect represents a version of the 'normal' pattern of acculturation or cultural adaptation in the Western Roman Empire.

How the West was Won

It is clear, from the genesis of the Welsh and Cornish as an identifiable people, that western Britain followed a different trajectory from the rest of (former) Roman Britain (Dark 2000, 150–192). In these areas, the successor identity to the over-arching Roman one was Brittonic, expressed by and large through language which united different polities that grew from the ruin of the political and tribal structures of late Roman Britain, a confederation much like the other 'barbarian' peoples of western Europe at this time (Halsall 2007, 58–59). Their language expressed an identity different from that of the emerging culture in the rest of former Roman Britain where the incoming groups and those (clearly many) natives who remained in that territory fused together as the English. But there is an issue here in why the language that dominated in the West was not a Romance Language but was instead the language of the native peoples. In short, how and why did people in western Britain end up speaking Welsh or Cornish rather than a language more akin to French or Spanish?

The mechanism for this particular change can, I suggest, be traced back to the nature of the society in the late Roman province of *Britannia Prima*. Elsewhere I have argued



Figure 10.1 The towns and villas of Britannia Prima, demonstrating the preponderance of Roman settlement in the eastern half (after White 2007, fig. 38)

that this province in essence comprised lands south of the River Mersey and west of the watershed that divides Britain between the rivers that flow respectively into the Irish and North Seas (White 2007, 36–42). This coherent block of territory was rich in mineral and agricultural resources, but included areas that diverged widely from each other in wealth and development (as also recognised by Dark 2000, 105). Essentially, the eastern half of this province

included its principal Roman settlements, comprising the putative capital at Cirencester as well as major towns such as Wroxeter, Gloucester and Exeter (Fig. 10.1). There were, in addition, comparatively large numbers of smaller towns, *vici* and numerous villas, especially around Cirencester and Gloucester. The main military base, Chester, lay in the same prosperous and Romanised region, which later became the English and Welsh Marches. Economically, politically and

socially, the elites in this region in the Roman period will have been undoubtedly dominant across *Britannia Prima*. The main trade routes brought them prestigious goods while the existence of the seat of local government ensured a plentiful supply of State wealth, patronage and prestige comparable in most respects to those enjoyed by the elites in the other provinces of Britain.

By contrast, the western half of the province had a very different character. The only town that one can speak of in this area is Carmarthen, the equivalent centre in the north tellingly being the *vicus* of the fort at Caernarfon, there being no extensive urban settlement developing in the north-west of what became Wales (the newly discovered small town on the coast of Anglesey at Tai Cochion is characterised as a roadside settlement – see Brindle 2016a, 2016b, 363, fig. 11.4). No major urban settlements are known in the south-west peninsula beyond the River Tamar either. The Roman presence in Wales especially was largely limited to forts with associated *vici*, while in the south-west peninsula there are few known forts, and none that appear to be occupied into the fourth century. Native settlements comprise isolated farmsteads dispersed across the landscape with only occasional buildings reflecting Roman influence, such as the rectangular buildings constructed within the polygonal enclosure at Din Lligwy on Anglesey (Brindle 2016b, fig. 11.13).

While such complexes appear to be relatively prestigious and may well have housed an elite aspiring to a more Roman identity, there is evidence too of a more native-orientated elite living still in the hillforts and small coastal forts that characterised the western periphery of the province (Brindle 2016b). Within *Britannia Prima*, by far the best known of these is Tintagel, but examples also occur in north Wales, such as Tre'r Creiri, which hint at elites with different identities and outlooks than their compatriots in the eastern half of the province – an identity that was distinctly more native than Roman (White 2007, 136–146). Importantly, the authority of these elites may well have rested still on the kinds of bonds that had operated in pre-Roman Iron Age societies. Although the basis of an Iron Age-style aggressive and war-like society will certainly not have been tolerated under Roman authority, there may have been other ways to perpetuate native power structures, including familial, religious or tribal loyalties operating at a very local level and requiring obligations and prestige that are difficult now to reconstruct. In terms of identity, therefore, there was probably little direct awareness of Rome, meaning that local and regional allegiances were much stronger than among those elites in the Romanised sectors of the province.

As the fifth century progressed, the prestige of the eastern, Roman, elite within *Britannia Prima* will have waned as their trade connections were either cut off or severely disrupted while government posts at all levels (and

the rewards of service) dried up. In contrast, the western, Brittonic, elite managed to develop or enhance a direct link with the Mediterranean trade that used the Atlantic sea route to bring a small, yet significant, amount of imports, including prestige goods such as wine and olive oil (Giot *et al.* 2003, fig. 43; Harris 2003). Thus, the balance of influence and power inexorably shifted from the eastern elites to the western elites – a development that, by the end of the seventh century, led to the dominant native culture supplanting the language of the Latin-speaking elite in favour of their own languages of Welsh and Cornish.

Religion and the Rise of the English

The trends outlined above will have been emphasised, and encouraged, by the parallel rise of English as a language. As the boundary between the Brittonic-speaking peoples of the West and the English-speaking peoples of the east hardened during the sixth and seventh centuries, those speaking Brittonic in areas now under English control will increasingly have felt compelled to adopt the language of the incoming community as their own. In addition to such social pressures, I believe that there is another factor that played an important role both in the rapid demise of Roman culture in the eastern half of England, and which helped to sharpen the ‘otherness’ of the surviving British culture in the west in the eyes of the developing English community: this factor was religious identity, and specifically pagan versus Christian identity.

While there is strong evidence for a renewal of paganism in fourth-century *Britannia Prima* through the construction of temples, particularly in the core area of the province around Cirencester and the Severn estuary (White 2007, 74–81), there must have been Christians too. The causal reference to Christians on a Bath curse tablet (*Tab. Sul.* 98; Tomlin 1988, 232–233) indicates as much and, tellingly, the Christian mosaics at Hinton St Mary and Frampton, produced by the ‘Durnovarian Group’, lie within the province (Cosh and Neal 2005, 70–71, 137, 157), as does Chedworth with its own material signs of Christianity (Esmonde Cleary 2013b, 95–97). Evidence for rural Christian communities thus tends to be associated with the elite operating within a rural social context derived from their position as landowners (Brown 2012, 192–197).

If the model of economic and social decline in the influence of late Roman elites in the eastern half of *Britannia Prima* outlined in the previous section is correct, one area where elite display and influence could have continued was through their role in the Church. As is well documented in the western provinces in general (Matthews 1975), elites were highly influential in the early Church primarily through occupying key roles, such as bishoprics and other senior posts, and establishing monasteries and churches both as a sign of piety and (more cynically perhaps) as a

form of control of their wealth. As the mechanisms and protection of the Roman State disintegrated, so did the power of Church grow: the change in allegiance from state to Church was one that was easy for the elites to achieve. In the fifth century, evidence for Christianity in western Britain grows much stronger. A simple reason for this may have been an influx of Christians from the provinces of eastern Britain which fell under the control of the pagan Anglo-Saxons. These refugees will have essentially been reinforcing existing but probably small Christian largely urban communities in the west. Evidence for this rapid growth, and for its elite status, is reflected in the widespread appearance of Class 1 tombstones throughout the western half of Britain: the existence of these stones implies a literate, connected and wealthy community in areas that had hitherto displayed little sign of such interests (Dark 2000, 156–167, 178–180).

The Latin-speaking elites of the West thus maintained their status and prestige through the Church. Key to this will have been sustaining Roman life and, I would argue, urban life in particular. The Roman Church required towns to survive for the principal reason that Church hierarchy was structured around cities and their populations (Thomas 1981, 191–201; Halsall 2007, 99–101). Whereas in the past the rich had put their wealth into civic building projects that simultaneously glorified their name, beautified their cities and provided their fellow citizens with amenities, so late Roman Christian elites were instead encouraged to invest in aiding the urban poor, as did St Augustine in his Sermons (Brown 2012, 341–347). As the civic mechanisms of government faltered and failed through the fifth century, so the Church stepped in, assuming the functions, and responsibilities, of civic officials, although, as Peter Brown points out, this does not mean that things carried on in the same way, with one form of elite merely replacing another (2012, 81–82).

In contrast, for the Germanic-speaking people settling in eastern Britain, interest and engagement with Christianity was non-existent. As has been pointed out, uniquely among the successor peoples of the post-Roman period, the Angles, Saxons and others were probably largely pagan (Halsall 2013, 278–279). In my opinion, this was a mortal blow to the survival of any sense of Roman-ness in what became Germanic-speaking regions. For those who lived in the east and were Christian (such as, presumably, the community in urban *Verulamium*), the removal of Roman administrative systems was disastrous, as it was in Gaul (Loseby 1992). The Church and its bishops may have had spiritual and moral authority, but no power. Those who wished to associate and assimilate with the incoming Germanic groups and their growing power-base thus had to not only abandon their over-arching Roman ethnicity/identity/allegiance but also Christianity. If they wished otherwise, their only alternative would be to emigrate to the last bastions of surviving Roman Christian society – namely the western part of Britain

(Thomas 1981, 266) or to Armorica or, as it became, ‘Lesser Britain’ (Giot *et al.* 2003).

Religion and, increasingly, language drove apart the formerly unified elements of Roman Britain and helped to foster ethnogenesis. But one of the more interesting aspects of the genesis of the English/Anglo-Saxons is why they failed to conquer the whole of Britain. How is it that the western and northern parts of the British Isles did not succumb? As a part-answer, it can be noted that the very north of Britain had proved too much to conquer even for the Romans, although they campaigned far into the north and sailed around the northern tip (Jones and Keillar 1996; Jones 2013, 97–98); so it is not surprising to find that the English failed in this. However, the western half of Britain should not have proved much of an obstacle. Rome’s conquest of what became Wales took around 30 years – from AD 47–78, and with major setbacks; but they then controlled the territory so thoroughly that the majority of its garrison was removed by the early second century and the area held for a further 200 years without any noticeable internal revolts or troubles (Burnham and Davies 2010, 37–66). The south-west peninsula took even less time to conquer, with forts established as far west as Bodmin in the AD 60s.

Yet on examining the map of the spread of English cultural influence, exhibited primarily as settlements with distinctive buildings such as halls and sunken-floored buildings and cemeteries with a cultural assemblage that is characterised as ‘Anglo-Saxon’ (Rippon *et al.* 2015, 30–33), it is immediately apparent that this does not extend much beyond a line drawn from the north Yorkshire coast at Whitby to Devon’s coast, with the western limit set as early as the fifth century (Halsall 2013, 230–234). Isolated instances of both do occur in the west. In Shropshire there is a small cemetery characteristically sited around a Bronze Age barrow at Bromfield near Ludlow but with no solid dating evidence (Stanford 1995, 130–141). More conclusively, there are large cemeteries at Lechlade, Gloucestershire (Boyle *et al.* 2011) and in the Avon valley (Bidford, Stretton on Fosse, Wasperton, among others) some of which are associated with Anglo-Saxon settlements (Carver *et al.* 2009, 132–133; see also Tompkins, this volume). None are very early in date, seeming to lie at the very earliest in the late fifth century but mostly are set to the sixth or seventh century. Later still is the seventh-century cluster of barrows in the Peak District (Ozanne 1962–1963). Beyond these examples, which lie at the edge of the western region, there is no hint of Germanic settlement or burial forms, despite extensive commercial archaeological activity for more than a quarter of a century.

Place-name evidence in contrast offers a picture of almost total loss of British or Roman influence, as has often been noted; but when did this comprehensive re-naming take place? Very few scholars would argue now that the Anglo-Saxon settlement, when it did occur in the English counties

of the west, occurred in a vacuum in which all previous inhabitants had abandoned the landscape. The naming of the region must have been a wholesale process, perhaps deliberate and politically motivated, to stamp an authority and ownership on the landscape, of the kind that is discussed by Oliver Padel in Devon and Cornwall (2007). If so, this kind of hegemony can only have happened later on once Anglo-Saxon (or perhaps more accurately English) authority had been established under the seven principal early Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Wessex, Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Sussex and Kent – the Heptarchy. No convincing evidence can be adduced to demonstrate early extensive or even non-intensive Germanic settlement in these western regions other than isolated sites on the fringes.

What then prevented the English from taking over this western region? If there was a vacuum in political power, as is suggested by the accepted collapse of Roman Britain and the western Empire in the early fifth century, then why did the incoming Germanic peoples not just move into it, especially if it was there for the taking? Distance might have been one issue, but this makes no sense when we see the rapidity with which the Visigoths moved across Italy, Gaul and then Spain within the space of a few decades (Heather 2005, 262–272). The Alps or Pyrenees were surely more of a formidable obstacle than the Welsh massif or Dartmoor. Something prevented Germanic occupation of the west, but what was it?

Towards a Narrative

My view remains that there was substantial resistance to incoming peoples in the west of Britain, initially orchestrated, as it was in Gaul, through Roman urban Christian elites. In the initial stages of the transfer of power (willingly or unwillingly) from the late Roman Empire to the provincial elites in the provinces of *Britannia*, incoming bands of non-Roman mercenaries were settled roughly along the borders of the eastern provinces of *Maxima Caesariensis* and *Flavia Caesariensis* and the northern and western frontiers of *Britannia Secunda* (Fig. 10.2), well away from the continental-facing coast which was still presumably defended by Saxon Shore forts and cliff-top towers of the Yorkshire coast (Halsall 2013, 218–220; it is important to note that Halsall dates this influx to the time of the revolt of Magnus Maximus in AD 383, rather than the more traditional dating and scenario adopted here). If the Saxon Shore defensive line had continued to be held, the hope presumably was that these Germanic groups would have been gradually absorbed into the population and assimilated as Romano-Britons. Instead, what happened was that resources to pay the mercenary troops ran out, soon after 430 when it is thought that the coin economy finally broke down (Walton and Moorhead 2016, 844–845). The phenomenon of late Roman silver hoards in Britain, such as Hoxne, Suffolk,



Figure 10.2 An indication of the location of the provinces of late Roman Britain. Note that none of the boundaries shown are certain (after White 2007, fig. 10)

buried in the early fifth century when the authorities will have been desperately seeking portable wealth to pay the mercenaries, is a clear reflection of the stress that those who had to pay for such groups will have been under (Guest 2014). In consequence, the mercenaries now felt emboldened to take over what they had been paid to defend – a situation probably exacerbated by the failure of the Saxon Shore defences to counter what soon became a steady influx of new settlers into the eastern provinces. As Halsall has pointed out, such troops could ‘act as ‘scouts’ for further emigration into Britain’ (2013, 234). This steady immigration, certainly from the mid-fifth century and throughout the sixth, caused the assimilation of the native British-speaking people into the incoming Germanic communities, whose more martial attitude likely ensured their leadership in the emerging hybrid, but Germanic-led society.

In the meantime, however, the very ‘tangible’ settlement of large numbers of incoming Germanic-speaking troops into a region that had not experienced large-scale non-Roman settlers before provoked a reaction in the neighbouring province of *Britannia Prima*. Their defence was reliant not on Germanic-speaking troops but on Irish and other mercenaries as well as possibly local troops: the *cohors Cornoviorum* attested at Newcastle on Hadrian's Wall indicate that recruitment was active in the region (Breeze

and Dobson 2000, app. 2 & 238). The Irish too had been kept well away from the frontier of the province, their settlement areas (as shown by ogham stone distributions) on the western coast being as a defence against their compatriots in Ireland or else to guard against attack from the Picts. Defence of what now became an eastern frontier to *Britannia Prima* was probably entrusted to local magnates who employed a motley of forces, probably mostly local peasants but including people like the ‘Gloucester Goth’ of the early fifth century or the band led by Cunorix at Wroxeter at the end of that century to resist any push further west from the new enemy (White 2007, 71–72, 201). Such resistance by landowning aristocracies who were ‘determined to remain Roman’ is known from Gaul in the fifth century who increasingly realised they could no longer rely on the state for protection (Esmonde Cleary 2013a, 438–441). It could be surprisingly effective as when in one attack a force of 18 men led by their commander Ecdicius, is said to have successfully broken the Gothic lines around Clermont Ferrand (Heather 2005, 419) but such success was increasingly rare and unusual (Elton 1992).

The real impact of the temporary, but effective, resistance, spanning the years between c. 410 and 430 or 440, is that it heavily reinforced the sense of a different ethnic identity between the native Romans and the incoming German-speaking people. The latter will have been assimilated to a degree to Roman life – as Halsall notes, there were close military and cultural ties and connections between the Late Roman Empire and the areas of northern Europe where these people were drawn from (2013, 221–230). The relatively sudden appearance of groups of people holding a different identity from the native Roman population, even if the incomers thought themselves to be ‘Roman’ too, will have provoked and encouraged the development of a strong sense of Roman identity along this new frontier.

These identities were enhanced as English/Anglo-Saxon power grew and as discrete kingdoms were established and the divergent religions of the two peoples pushed them further apart. In time, the Brittonic elites of the western half of *Britannia Prima* began to assert themselves, largely because in the changed circumstances of the breakdown of trade routes across south-eastern Britain and the strengthening of the existing western seaboard trade routes, they began to accumulate a power-base drawing on access to prestige goods and, quite possibly, the support of the Irish mercenaries settled on the western coast, as evidenced by stones inscribed in ogham and through place-names (Mytum 1995). The eastern provincial Roman elite, meanwhile, having won a respite through their earlier defence of the marches, were beset by forces from both west and east so that their initially co-ordinated military response broke down into localised centres of power based on the now badly decayed Roman towns of

the region, as for example with the alliance between the ‘kings’ of Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath whose defeat was recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* s.a. 577 or the abandonment of Wroxeter archaeologically dated to the later sixth or early seventh century (White and Barker 1997, 130–136). Gradually, each individual base was picked off by either their Brittonic or English neighbours. Thus, the Brittonic identity asserted itself over the Roman one, adopting a Christian religious identity as it did so, but on the basis not of a church based on urban centres but on the new model of monastic bishops pioneered in Gaul (Brown 2012, 425–426). The monastic model suited the emerging Brittonic kings better than urban-based Christianity, presumably because they found it easier to control, but the development provoked the ire of the Roman clergy such as Gildas, author of the religious work ‘On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain’ (*De Excidio Britanniae*) and led to tensions between the Brittonic (‘Celtic’) and Roman Churches.

The subservient nature of the relationship between the dwindling Roman elites of the eastern half of what had been *Britannia Prima* and the increasingly powerful and confident chiefs and kings of the western half is clearly demonstrated by the lack of prestige goods making their way from the western seaboard to the marches. Much has been made of the evidence for trade in the west with south-western Gaul and northern Spain, and via these routes to the Mediterranean (Harris 2003), and the appearance of that evidence on elite native sites in the west rather than in the towns (Lane 2014, 509–511). The evidence can be read in a number of ways, however. First it demonstrates that the native elites, merely through their geographical proximity to the sea, were able to dominate and exploit trade in a way that the inland cities of the west could not. Second, by largely denying the elites in the decaying Roman towns access to high-status goods they continued to diminish their power and position. (It is telling that the only evidence we have for a prestige item at Wroxeter in this period is the finger bone of a Barbary Ape – see Hammon 2011, 290; this is presumably a surviving fragment of a useless but highly distinctive gift that an overlord from the western seaboard might have offered to a bemused lesser potentate inland).

It has been argued that the principal reason why fifth- and sixth-century material culture is not found in Roman towns in the west is that they had ceased to exist by then (e.g. Lane 2014, 513), but this ignores the presence and survival of the Roman Church in the western territory. Since there was no monasticism in Britain before the sixth century at the earliest, the Church can only have survived in an urban context – there was no other possible location for it. Thus, *Episcopus* Flavius Viventius and the *clericus* Cunitus named on Roman-style salt-pans from Cheshire (Penney and Shotter 1996 and 2000), while undated, perhaps evidence the transfer of the interest of the late Roman state

in salt and its production to its natural heir – the Church in the post-Roman period. More tenuously, we can point to the existence of the *territorium* of Wroxeter fossilised in medieval diocesan boundaries (Bassett 1992). At a slightly later date, with the newly Christianised Anglo-Saxons on the offensive, we can attest the presence of a British Christian community in the west substantial enough to call a synod in Chester early in the seventh century (Mason 2007, 19, 29–30). It was in the conflict between the Anglo-Saxon Church, backed by the Pope and acting under his authority, and the Brittonic and Roman Churches that we see just how isolated the elite community based on the former Roman towns of eastern *Britannia Prima* had become. All three communities had different ways of calculating the date of Easter: the Anglo-Saxon Church was using the most up-to-date method. The Brittonic and Irish ('Celtic') Church was aware of the limitations of the original fourth-century Easter tables and had corrected them, eccentrically, to produce ten different versions of calculation, while the Roman Church in Britain was still using the original Easter Tables, the '*Roman Supputatio*' which operated on an 84-year cycle, given to them when the Church was first established in *Britannia* (Wallis 1999, xxxiv–lxiii). It was not surprising that King Edwin chose as he did at the synod of Whitby.

Conclusion

While a narrative (plausible or otherwise) can be constructed, we are woefully short of evidence to demonstrate if this reconstruction is close to the truth or not. Above all we need more data, more well-executed and targeted excavation of sites across the west of *Britannia*, underpinned by comprehensive scientific dating programmes. Without the latter we will forever be stymied by arguments over depth of stratigraphic sequences and how much time they took to generate. I would also argue for a thorough and comprehensive revisiting of material gathered from earlier excavations – in Chester, Wroxeter, Gloucester, Bath, Exeter and the other major cities of the Roman west – for I would anticipate that among the huge archives of these sites may be missed evidence for imported pottery and other cultural material. As Millett (2014, 218–219) has argued, targeted programmes of radiometric dating of stratified bone assemblages will surely help to settle once and for all the date of abandonment of these towns, Wroxeter being a prime target for this (Hammon 2011). There is much that could be achieved with a well-focused and adequately funded research plan; we just need to formulate and execute it.

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Landscape, Economy and Society in Late and Post-Roman Wales

Andy Seaman

Introduction

Despite being located on the very western edge of the Roman Empire, Wales is a good place to explore transformations of landscapes and people in Late Antiquity. The Principality includes areas that fall into the ‘upland’ and ‘lowland’ zones of Britain, and it was not subject to ‘barbarian’ settlement following the end of Roman control. Thus, Wales provides a unique case study in socio-political and economic change against which we can compare evidence from other parts of the Empire (Wickham 2010). This opportunity is tempered by some methodological challenges, however. A lack of material culture dating from the late fourth, fifth and sixth centuries means that comparatively few post-Roman settlements have been securely identified (Edwards and Lane 1988, 2). Moreover, sites that have seen excavation rarely yield substantial artefact assemblages, particularly in terms of the animal bones and plant macrofossils that are crucial for exploring socio-economic change. Analysis of offsite palaeoenvironmental sequences has great potential for addressing these problems, but currently few sequences from core areas of settlement have sufficient spatial and chronological resolution to be of value. These problems aside, Wales features prominently in the literature on the transformation of the Roman Britain (e.g. Alcock 1971; Dark 2000; White 2007; Wickham 2010), although opinions are divided as to the nature and extent of continuity and change. In this chapter, I will explore these issues by considering evidence for rural landscapes and settlement hierarchies between the third and seventh centuries AD. It will be argued that the south-east was the most Romanised part of the country and also the area where there was the greatest discontinuity at the end of the Roman period; nonetheless, the north and west were in no way immune to the changes brought about by the end of Romano-British administration.

Overall, it will be concluded that economic systems and the nature of interactions between the late Roman State and native elites were crucial for shaping regional patterns of change.

Late Roman Settlement and Economy

There was a strong regional character to the rural settlement and economy of late Roman Wales, but a broad contrast can be drawn between the north and south of the country (Figs 11.1 and 11.2).¹ Towns and villas are restricted to the lowland coastal strip in the south, where civil administration had been established by the late first century AD (Arnold and Davies 2001; Manning 2015). There were two *civitas* capitals, at Caerwent (*Venta*) and Carmarthen (*Moridunum*); the latter is Britain’s smallest *civitas* capital, but both contained a range of public and private buildings, and we can view the status of each as regional administrative centres. Indeed, an early third-century inscription from Caerwent refers to the ‘Council of the Silures’ (RIB 311 – Collingwood and Wright 1965). Excavations undertaken during the early twentieth century revealed a comparatively complete plan of late Roman Caerwent (Brewer 2006, 57). Its population is estimated at between 2400–3800 for the third and fourth centuries, but this may be somewhat high given the density of buildings (Brewer 2006, 14). The basilica was dismantled around AD 360, but the town’s wealth and status during the fourth century is attested by its impressive circuit of stone walls (with towers added c. 350), temple (built c. 330 and modified later), and at least 17 Mediterranean style courtyard houses, several of which had mosaic pavements and plastered walls (Brewer 2006, 20–21; Cosh and Neal 2010, 340–380). The fourth century population is likely to have included a military garrison

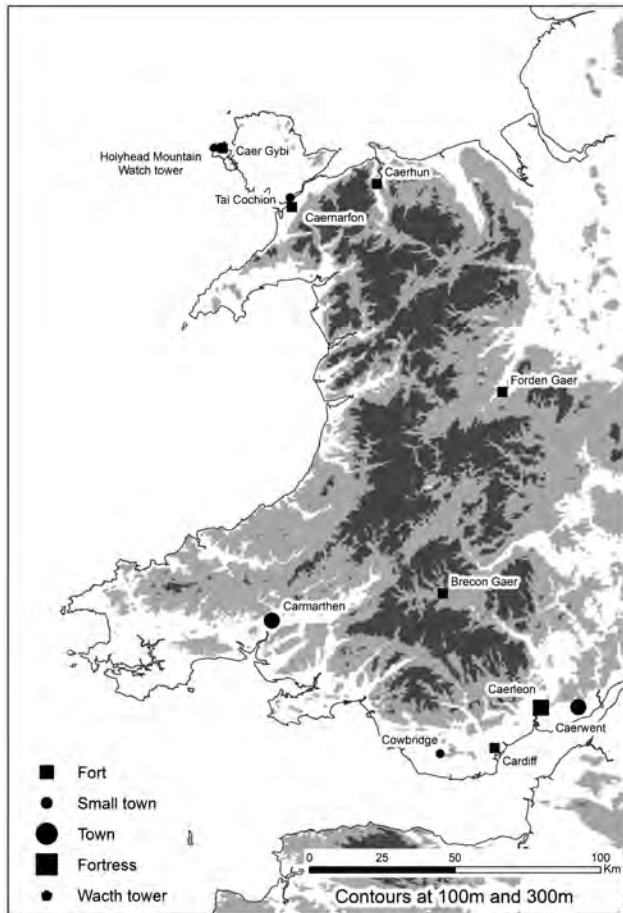


Figure 11.1 Towns and military sites in fourth-century Wales (source: author)

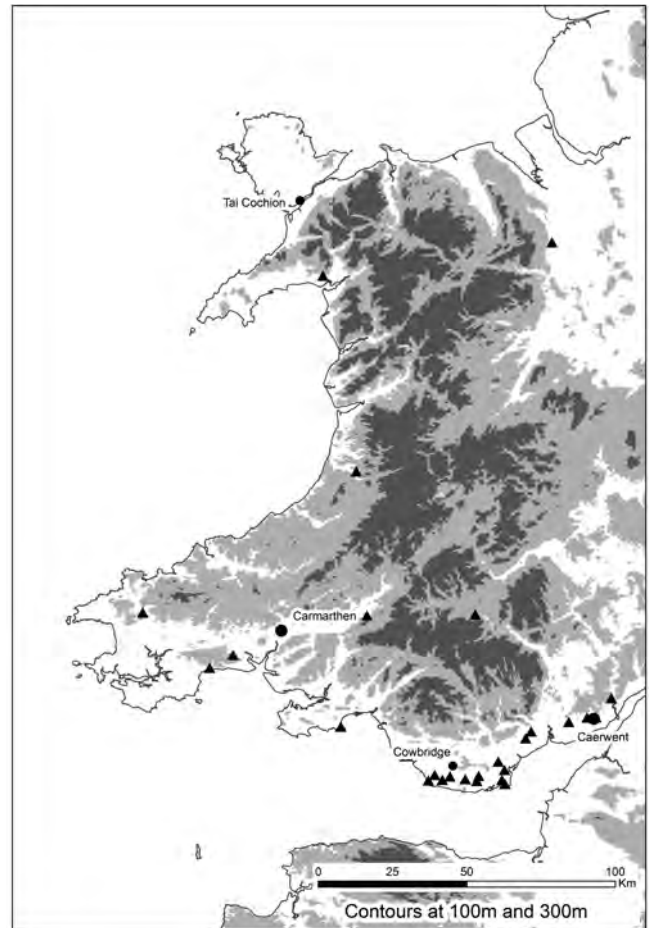


Figure 11.2 Roman villas in Wales (source: author)

(White 2007, 71), but its leading families would have been members of the native aristocracy who held estates in the sounding countryside (Manning 2015, 17). Caerwent is indeed surrounded by a scatter of villas, but few have been excavated, although small-scale rescue excavations at Ford Farm (8.5 km east of Caerwent) revealed evidence of a villa with fourth-century mosaics (Cosh and Neal 2010, 383). The geographic extent of the *civitas Silurum* is debated, however, and a substantial part of Gwent, including the Levels, would have formed a *territorium* associated with the legionary fortress at Caerleon. Thus, lands to the west, including the Vale of Glamorgan and Gower, were probably administered from another centre, such as the small town at Cowbridge (Parkhouse and Evans 1996). The territory of Gwent north of Wentwood may have been administered from another small town, or even one of the roadside settlements which succeeded early Roman forts at Monmouth, Abergavenny and Usk (Arnold and Davies 2001, 62).

At least 22 villas have been identified in south Wales, the vast majority of which lay in the fertile lowlands of Gwent and Glamorgan (Fig. 11.2). Excavations are few, but modest ‘villa farmsteads’, such as that at Whitton (Glamorgan)

excavated in the 1960s (Jarrett and Wrathmell 1981), were common (Fig. 11.3). Most had hypocausts, several were of sufficient status to have bath-houses and mosaics, and artefact assemblages are in keeping with those from villas known throughout southern Britain (RCAHMW 1976, 110–117; Robinson 1988; Cosh and Neal 2010, 382–388). The comparatively complex villa at Caer Mead (Glamorgan) had over 30 rooms, a hypocaust, bath-house and mosaic. It is the largest from south Wales and would not have been out of place in the West Country of England (Hogg and Smith 1974). Indeed, the villa peaked around AD 340, at the time when some West Country villas were entering a ‘golden age’ of opulence (Hogg and Smith 1974, 238; Mattingly 2006, 374). In addition to the villas, numerous enclosed roundhouse settlements have been traced, such as Biglis (Glamorgan), Cae Summerhouse (Glamorgan) and Thornwell Farm (Gwent); these rural farmsteads were of lower status, and their inhabitants likely included peasants and *coloni* (landless tenants). Nevertheless, related finds assemblages demonstrate that by the late Roman period the identity and aspirations of these rural communities also drew in some measure upon *Romanitas*.

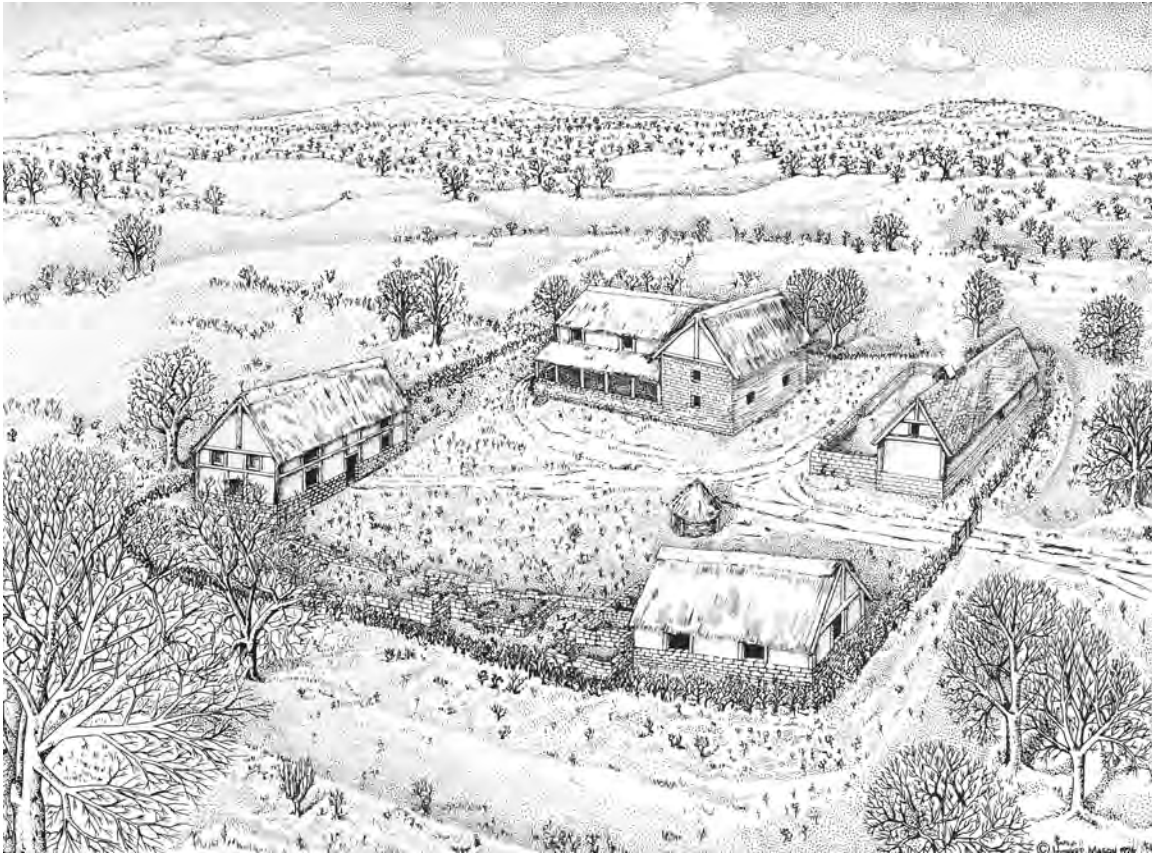


Figure 11.3 Reconstruction of Whitton Roman villa (Glamorgan) in the early fourth century (image © Howard Mason)

It was because of this concentration of Romanised settlement forms that south-east Wales was included in the ‘central belt zone’ of the *Rural Settlement of Roman Britain* project (Smith *et al.* 2016, 16). This zone, extending from south-east Wales across a swathe of central England into Lincolnshire and west Norfolk, was characterised by a mixed, but Romanised, rural settlement pattern composed of farmsteads, villas, roadside settlements and villages (*ibid.*, 141–207). Thus, the archaeology suggests that late Roman communities in south-east Wales were more aligned to contemporary groups in southern England than in ‘upland’ Wales, and local elites were part of a wider aristocracy whose status and identity were framed by *Romanitas* (Gerrard 2013, 133–143; Henig 2006).

The south Welsh villas were as much units of agricultural production as they were aristocratic (or, at least, more affluent) rural residences, and they would have been associated with agricultural estates that included satellite settlements. Animal bone evidence attests to the importance of sheep and cattle in the rural economy, but scarcely an excavated settlement has failed to produce evidence for cereal production, which must have been undertaken on a significant scale in the late Roman period (Arnold and Davies 2001, 93). Excavations at Whitton, for example, identified granaries, barns, corn-driers, querns, and evidence

for a mechanical mill, alongside a substantial animal bone assemblage (Jarrett and Wrathmell 1981). The evidence from farmsteads is similar, and fragments of Mayen lava querns, corn-driers, and four-post granary structures are known at sites including Cae Summerhouse, Biglis and Woodland Cottages, Caldicot (Gwent) (Davies 1973; Robinson 1988). The Gwent Levels would not have been suited to arable farming, but would have provided extensive tracts and rich pasture; thus, they appear to have been managed as specialist sheep/cattle/horse farms administered by an imperial *procurator saltus* (Allen and Fulford 1986, 115).

Roman material culture and Romanised settlement forms are less common in the south-west (Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire) than they are in the south-east, and it is unlikely that the *civitas* dependent upon *Moridunum* (Carmarthen) extended much beyond its immediate hinterland. There is evidence of three possible villa farmsteads in south-west Wales, but none displays the level of wealth seen in the mosaics, sculpture, plastered walls and bath-houses found further east. Most Roman-period rural settlements in south-west Wales show a greater affinity with local Iron Age settlement traditions than *Romanitas* (Williams 1990). Late Roman settlement evidence is comparatively rare, but third- and fourth-century occupation associated with timber and stone roundhouses occurs at a number of enclosures,



Figure 11.4 Porth y Rhaw multivallate coastal promontory fort (Pembrokeshire). The interior is much eroded, but excavations by Crane and Murphy (2010) identified a complex sequence of occupation which included a late Roman phase associated with a substantial round house (© Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. © Hawlfraint y Goron: Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru)

ringforts and hillforts, including Porth y Rhaw, Walesland Rath and Drim Camp in Pembrokeshire (Wainwright 1971; Williams and Mytum 1998; Crane and Murphy 2010) (Fig. 11.4). The rural economy of south-west Wales was less intensive than that of the south-east, with the production of cereals secondary to pastoral farming (Arnold and Davies 2001, 92–93; Smith *et al.* 2016, 380–384). Roman coinage and pottery are also much rarer finds than in the south-east, and rural communities beyond the hinterland of Carmarthen must have had limited access to regional exchange networks. Despite the general low levels of Romano-British material culture, we can trace a settlement hierarchy in the late Roman period. However, it is sites like the promontory fort at Coygan Camp, rather than villas, which have produced the richest material culture (Wainwright 1967; Davies 1980, 487); in contrast, high status domestic occupation of hillforts was not a feature of Gwent and Glamorgan at this time (Seaman 2016, 37).

While the majority of Roman villas in Wales lie in the southern coastal strip, a small number have been identified further north. Excavations at Llys Brychan

(Carmarthenshire) revealed evidence for a villa with a hypocaust, tiled roof and possibly a mosaic or tessellated floor (Jarrett 1962). This site was probably associated with *Moridunum*, but villas at Abermagwr (Cardiganshire) and Maesderwen (Brecknockshire), and less certain examples at Plas Coch (Denbighshire) and Tremadog (Caernarfonshire), are isolated examples in areas that otherwise display limited evidence of Romanisation (Jones and Owen 1999; Jones 2011; Davies and Driver 2011). At Maesderwen there is evidence for an impressive third/fourth century bathhouse with mosaics (Cosh and Neal 2010, 383–384), but the others do not display a high level of opulence. At Abermagwr geophysical survey and excavation revealed a small villa similar in plan to examples from England, but lacking evidence of wealth and pretension; it had simple clay floors, no hypocaust, bathhouse or painted wall-plaster, and comparatively few finds (Davies and Driver 2011). We could interpret these sites as a sign that during the third and fourth centuries more overtly Romanised architectural styles were taking root, albeit on a modest scale, amongst communities in which native building traditions had hitherto dominated,



Figure 11.5 Air photograph of Din Lligwy enclosure (Anglesey) with a combination round and rectangular stone buildings of Romano-British date (© Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. © Hawlfraint y Goron: Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru)

perhaps as a result of marriage partnerships between indigenous elites and Roman officials, such as *stationarii* garrisoned at forts (Waddington 2013, 107; Manning 2015, 20). Alternatively, they could be the residences of retired military veterans (Mattingly 2006, 355). However, it is tempting to suggest that some represented isolated imperial initiatives. The settlement with a bath-house at Pentre Farm (Flintshire), for example, was interpreted as the *principia* of a *procurator metallorum* associated with local lead- and silver-mining rather than a native domestic settlement (O'Leary 1989), and Smith *et al.* (2016, 383) suggest that Abermagwr could be interpreted in a similar way.

Despite the presence of these villas, the settlement pattern throughout mid- and north Wales was characterised by native rather than Roman traditions (Arnold and Davies 2001, 67–72; Smith *et al.* 2016, 368–376). The evidence from the north-west is the strongest, with late Roman material identified on number of enclosed and less frequently unenclosed farmsteads, such as Din Lligwy (Anglesey), Cefn Graeanog II (Caernarfonshire), and Cae Metta (Caernarfonshire) (Waddington 2013, 22). Typically,

these settlements consist of small groups of round or occasionally rectangular, drystone buildings often set into the walls of rectilinear or polygonal enclosures (Fig. 11.5). Signs of *Romanitas* are limited and some communities may never have adopted Roman material culture practices. Nevertheless, small quantities of high status objects such as fine wares are common, particularly after the mid-second century. Interestingly, however, some vessels show evidence for repair, implying that access to material was limited or irregular (Waddington 2013, 22). The rural economy was less intense than in the south-east, but more arable-focused than the south-west (Smith *et al.* 2016, 380–384). Few rural settlements have been identified east of the River Conway, and although Romano-British activity is likely to have succeeded late Iron Age occupation at Rhuddlan and Prestatyn, it is difficult to draw meaningful interpretations (Jones 1990). There is evidence for Romano-British activity within hillforts throughout mid- and north Wales, however, and late Roman material is present at numerous sites including Breiddin (Montgomeryshire), Moel Fenlli (Denbighshire) and Tre'r Ceiri (Caernarfonshire) (Smith

et al. 2016, 365, 383). Data related to late Roman occupation are limited and in many cases activity may not have been on a significant scale (Davies 1980, 297–298). Nevertheless, substantial assemblages of fine wares, coinage and glass from several hillforts, including Dinorben (Denbighshire) and Degannwy (Caernarfonshire) imply that these sites were the focus of high status activity (Alcock 1967; Davies 1980, 445–456).

The official imperial presence in mid- and north Wales was restricted to forts and their associated *vici*, and the only possible ‘small town’ north of Carmarthen is the roadside settlement at Tai Cochion (Anglesey) (Hopewell 2016). This area was not a late Roman ‘military zone’, however. By the early third century, only five forts were certainly in use, but their levels of occupation are indicative of small garrisons (Burnham and Davies 2010). Moreover, the forts were too far from one another and from the legionary bases at Caerleon and Chester to have served a purely military function (Manning 2015, 9–11). Yet nor should we view north and west Wales as backwaters in which imperial influences were peripheral to native institutions (Mattingly 2006, 503). Instead, we see socio-political and economic relationships between the native communities and the Roman State that were most probably as intensive, albeit of very different nature to those of lowland southern Britain. Thus, rather than simply functioning as military installations, forts garrisoned by *stationarii* performed some of the administrative functions of towns, overseeing civil administration and the collection *annona* (tax paid in-kind) (Burnham and Davies 2010, 48). In this system, rural communities were allowed to use (their) land subject to tribute and taxation payments, but given the limited administrative infrastructure and the comparatively limited potential for substantial agricultural yields, the actual collection of taxes was allocated to elites who exercised control locally through ties of kinship (Dark 2000, 170).

Landscape, Culture and Identity

The towns and the numerous villas in south-east Wales attest to the presence of a Romanised *curial* class who could command substantial agricultural surpluses. There would also have been State-appointed landlords (*conductores*) who oversaw the management of imperial estates, such as those on the Gwent Levels. The fortunes of this group were vested in the Roman State; the cycle of taxation, State purchasing and expenditure drove a surplus-producing economy that allowed those in control of land to accumulate private wealth. The imperial administrative infrastructure not only underpinned a system from which they could benefit financially, but provided access to positions of power through the holding of provincial office, and engendered the culture of *Romanitas* with a potent symbolism that defined and upheld their status and identity (Gerrard 2013,

247–248). Thus, Henig argues that Gwent and Glamorgan belonged ‘to the same zone of civilian culture ... which flourished in Gloucester and Somerset’ (Henig 2006, 1). The situation was different in the south-west, however; at just six hectares in size Carmarthen was much smaller than Caerwent (18 ha) and the comparatively limited excavations within the town have failed to reveal comparable levels of wealth. There is, as noted, evidence for thin scatter of villa farmsteads surrounding Carmarthen, but the evidence for a well-established Romanised aristocratic class is much weaker.

Moreover, as we move away from Carmarthen, Roman influences become weaker still and the rural economy less intense. Late Roman artefacts occur in comparatively small quantities on rural settlements in south-west Wales, and it must be significant that the settlement that has produced the richest artefact assemblage is Coygan Camp, a re-occupied hillfort. Further north, this trend is amplified. There is one possible small town and only a few villas, and throughout mid- and north Wales settlements display few signs of *Romanitas*. There is no good evidence for the existence of a native *curial* class, and again the settlements with the richest artefact assemblages are often, but not solely, hillforts. The political and economic horizons of these rural communities were comparatively narrow compared to those in the south-east, and traditional cultural idioms were more important than *Romanitas*. Thus, the accumulation of wealth and status in these zones centred far more on kin-relationships and the control of flocks and herds, rather than the exploitation of large arable surpluses or positions within the imperial hierarchy (Hingley 1989, 144–148; Mattingly 2006, 371, 401–408, 416–418).

Nevertheless, it was not the case that these communities were totally insulated from Roman influences. In north-west Wales, for example, the establishment of the military garrison stimulated a growth in the numbers of rural settlements, and from the second century we see Roman influence in the form of a shift towards settlements with rectangular enclosures and buildings (Smith *et al.* 2016, 380–384; Waddington 2013, 22, 107).

These regional contrasts are too strong to be a product simply of the relative intensity of archaeological fieldwork, and we should recognise that a number of social, political, economic and environmental factors must have influenced the rural landscapes and cultures of late Roman Wales. Agricultural productivity and economic potential of land were crucial, and there was, within Wales and southern Britain in general, a broad correlation between *Romanitas* and the productive capacity of the rural landscape (Hingley 1989, 144–146). Access to transport networks and regional markets was a closely related factor, as these facilitated participation in the imperial system. Systems of landholding and the extent of native involvement in local governance were perhaps most important however. In lowland Britain,

including south-east Wales, systems of private, elite landownership that facilitated the tight management and control of agriculture can be evidenced (e.g. Davies 1979; Hassall and Tomlin 1994, 302–324), whilst *civitas* capitals and their *curia* (as evidenced at Caerwent by RIB 311) provided direct access to Roman influences and positions of authority. In upland areas, however, land and administrative systems were controlled directly by the state, and opportunities for local elites to accrue substantial surpluses or participate in civil government were limited (Mattingly 2006, 523). Together these factors influenced Roman Wales' rural economies, appurtenant settlement patterns, the attitudes of communities to *Romanitas* and the importance that was attributed to native non-Roman idioms in the construction of identities and systems of social reproduction. When looked at in this way we can see how Romanised settlement types may held limited power in comparison to more traditional symbols of wealth and power throughout much of north and west Wales (Hingley 1989, 146). It will be argued below that these regional patterns are also key for understanding changes in the post-Roman period.

Continuity and Change in Late and Post-Roman Wales

There is considerable debate as to how settlements and society in Wales changed between the fourth and seventh centuries. This section examines the available evidence regarding settlement continuity and discontinuity, before moving on to consider explanatory models.

Few coins of the Houses of Valentinian and Theodosius have been recovered from rural settlements in either north or south Wales (Guest and Wells 2007). Late fourth-century pottery is also comparatively rare and some commentators have suggested that many rural settlements were abandoned by c. AD 340/60, and a generation or more *before* the conventional 'end of Roman Britain' (see, for example, RCAHMW 1976, 111–118; Robinson 1988, xxi). Before we attribute too much significance to this, we should note that coins only provide a *terminus post quem*, and in regions such as Wales, where supplies of coinage did not penetrate strongly (chiefly due to limited urbanism), it is possible that settlements continued to be occupied later than the dates of the latest coins found on them (Dark 2000, 54–56). We could, for instance, associate the general lack of Theodosian-period coinage on rural settlements with the probable reduction of the military garrison from Wales in the 390s rather than the widespread abandonment of sites (Burnham and Davies 2010, 64). Nevertheless, while it is possible that many late Roman rural settlements were still occupied (on some level) after the mid-/late fourth century, additional positive evidence is required if we want to push occupation as late as the fifth or even sixth century. Moreover, even

when there is evidence for post-Roman activity, this does not necessarily imply that occupation was continuous or of the same nature or intensity.

These are important points to note, because, since the early 1990s, some scholars have argued that late Roman political and economic structures continued uninterrupted into the fifth and sixth century on the basis of settlement sequences which may extend beyond the traditional early fifth-century 'end of Roman Britain' (Dark 1994, 2000; White 2007). Ken Dark, for example, has argued that 'the survival the Roman 'settlement hierarchy' through the fifth and sixth centuries ... provides a clear context for the survival of other aspects of fourth century Romano-British culture' (2000, 105). While Roger White does not argue for such a high level of direct continuity, he sees the possible fifth- and sixth-century sequence at Wroxeter (Shropshire) as evidence for the continuation of urban life and *Romanised* lifestyles within the eastern part of the province of *Britannia Prima* (White 2007; this volume). These interpretations raise legitimate issues surrounding periodisation and the identification of fifth- and sixth-century sites. However, I would argue that both Dark and White under-appreciate the extent to which the late Roman settlement hierarchy was part of a *mode of production* that was dependent upon the efficacy of the imperial/provincial economy. Moreover, they also fail to appreciate the extent to which the fifth century witnessed a shift in the ideologies and idioms that reinforced elite power and authority (Gerrard 2013). The discovery of post-Roman material on or close to late Roman settlements could in fact be explained in ways that do not imply continuity of late Roman socio-political and economic systems, and so an exploration of settlement continuity must therefore consider site location, function and socio-economic context.

The lack of widespread fifth-century material culture admittedly makes this a difficult task and more definitive answers will require scientific dating of the latest 'Roman' and earliest 'post-Roman' settlement deposits, undertaken in combination with high-resolution palaeoenvironmental analyses of surrounding rural landscapes (cf Rippon, this volume). The palaeoenvironmental evidence will be considered below, but a useful analysis can be made by considering the distribution and contexts of ceramics from the eastern Mediterranean, including red slip wares and amphorae, that were imported into western Britain between the mid-/late fifth and mid-sixth centuries (Campbell 2007). It is recognised that post-Roman imports are comparatively rare and entire site assemblages often represent no more than a handful of vessels. Moreover, they are not found in all parts of Wales and their distribution is strongly associated with high status sites. Nevertheless, they provide important evidence, and in the areas where they are found some interesting patterns emerge. In Romanised south-east Wales, we can observe very little correlation between the distribution

of imported goods and the older, late Roman settlement pattern. Strikingly, imported wares are absent from all of the villa sites which have seen substantial excavation, with the exception of Llandough (Glamorgan), but here relevant material was associated with an adjacent cemetery that had succeeded domestic occupation of the villa (Holbrook and Thomas 2005). Conversely, late Roman material is rare on settlements that do have such imports (Seaman 2016, 39). Excavation has shown that inhumation burials were cut into several Roman settlements in Glamorgan during the post-Roman period, including Llandough, Ely, Biglis and Llantwit Major, but none has revealed firm evidence that they were occupied as domestic residences at the time that the deceased were interred. Moreover, the dating evidence, where available, suggests a gap of some centuries between the domestic and funerary phases (Holbrook and Thomas 2005, 88; Redknap and Lewis 2007, 574–575). Nor have any lower status farmsteads revealed evidence for post-Roman occupation, and while this may be product of a chronic lack of diagnostic material culture, the absence of Type G penannular brooches and early Anglo-Saxon metalwork may be significant given that these are often found on sites that do yield up fragments of these imported materials.

At the same time, the comparative lack of post-Roman settlements in the archaeological record for Wales means that it is difficult to draw broad comparisons with the late Roman evidence. Fortunately, the well-excavated high status hillforts at Dinas Powys (Alcock 1963) and Hen Gastell (Wilkinson 1995) provide good evidence with which to compare social and economic activities to the villas that preceded them at the top of the local settlement hierarchy (Seaman 2016, 39–43). These small, but highly defended hilltop settlements associated with timber houses and evidence for craft activities, feasting and metalworking form a striking contrast to late Roman villas, in terms of their size, location, layout and function. There is no doubting the continued influence of *Romanitas* within these hillfort communities; with the exception of post-Roman imported wares and metalwork, artefact assemblages are almost indistinguishable from those typical of the fourth century, and the preference for glossy tablewares and amphorae suggests emulation/continuation of Roman culinary practices (Bowles 2006, 288–293; Campbell 2007, 135). This should not be surprising, as the occupants of these sites must have derived from the late Roman population.

However, when we consider how the hillforts operated we see communities that were moving away from late Roman idioms. This is seen most clearly in their hilltop positions and rampart defences, neither of which were a feature of the late Roman settlement pattern in the region (Seaman 2016, 37). Indeed, it has been suggested that these developments harked back to the *pre-Roman* past (Bowles 2006, 348). At Dinas Powys, the comparatively rich evidence provides a glimpse of a society in which systems

of social reproduction based upon *Romanitas* and *paideia* had given way to sources of power focused on the forging of personal alliances through violence and intimidation, gift-exchange and feasting (Seaman 2013). Villas with mosaics and wall-paintings would likely have been familiar to the occupants of hillforts, but lacked relevance in what had become a more local and military society (Wickham 2009, 106). A movement to hilltop sites of course also implies a scenario of insecurity or at least a need for the leaders of the hilltop communities to oversee territories from an elevated vantage point (Seaman 2013, 11, 2016).

Before exploring the rural settlement evidence from the west and north of Wales I will consider the evidence from the south Welsh towns. Import ware is absent at Carmarthen and Cowbridge, and currently we lack evidence that either site served as an urban centre or indeed place of occupation after c. AD 400–420 (Parkhouse and Evans 1996; James 2003). The post-Roman evidence from Caerwent is more positive, but while some form of continuity can be identified, occupation was not urban in scale or function. The coin sequence continues down to 402 and some hoards may have been deposited later, but evidence for fifth-century activity is restricted to a single zoomorphic penannular brooch, which could in fact date to the late fourth century (Edwards and Lane 1988, 35–38); Mediterranean imports have not been recovered, despite numerous excavations within the town (although Caerwent is east of the main distribution of imported wares in south Wales); nor can any structural evidence be attributed to the post-Roman period. Excavations outside the East Gate revealed a cemetery containing at least 136 inhumations; a post-Roman, as opposed to late Roman, date for this cemetery is supported by an unstratified Type G penannular brooch found between two burials and ten radiocarbon dates calibrated to between the fifth and eighth centuries. Potentially this reflects the continuity of a (largely archaeologically invisible) population within the town, but more probably the cemetery was used by surrounding rural communities (Campbell and McDonald 1993). Caerwent is unlikely, therefore, to have been completely abandoned, but the nature of occupation, and whether it was continuous, remains enigmatic. Furthermore, the evidence for fifth- and sixth-century urban occupation at Wroxeter, the key case study for urban continuity in western Britain, has been convincingly challenged by Lane (2014). Recent excavations within the fortress at Caerleon have identified evidence for post-Roman occupation, including stone building footings, on the site of an abandoned warehouse (Gardiner and Guest 2010, 20–21). This adds to the body of evidence for post-Roman occupation elsewhere in and around the fortress (Seaman 2010, 250–253), but firm chronologies are lacking and there are currently no grounds for drawing legitimate comparisons with fourth- to seventh-century sequences identified at some military sites on the northern frontier (Collins and Breeze 2014, 67). Thus, although imperfect, the

evidence suggests that in south-east Wales there was a major disjuncture not only in urban and rural settlement patterns, but also in elite ideologies and systems of social reproduction between the mid-/late fourth and mid-fifth centuries.

As we move further west and north, the number of settlements with both late- and post-Roman material increases, although they still cannot be described as widespread. In the south-west slight evidence for post-Roman occupation has been identified on a number of small Romano-British enclosures, such as Drim Camp and Cwm Gloyne (Pembrokeshire) (Edwards and Lane 1988, 68–69; Mytum and Webster 2001). However, here there is also evidence that settlements of local and/or regional status retained their function across the fourth and fifth/sixth centuries. The promontory fort at Coygan Camp has previously been noted as being one of the richest Romano-British settlements in south-west Wales, but the site also produced an assemblage of imported ware, as well as evidence for fine metalworking. Interestingly, sherds of south midlands shell-tempered ware, which started to appear on Welsh sites no earlier than c. AD 350 and was in circulation until at least the early-fifth century, were also recovered from Coygan Camp (Wainwright 1967). Thus, in contrast to defended settlement further east, a strong case can be made for continuous high-status occupation between the late and post-Roman periods (Edwards and Lane 1988, 44–46; Campbell 2007). Continuity is also probable at other high-status defended settlements in south-west Wales, including Carew Castle and Castell Henllys (Gerrard 1990; Mytum 2013). It is not the case, however, that all high-status post-Roman settlements were either defended or occupied continuously from the fourth century. Excavations at Longbury Bank, for example, recovered an assemblage of at least 30 imported vessels of fifth- to seventh-century date, but there was no evidence for late Roman occupation or defences (Campbell and Lane 1993).

Post-Roman settlement evidence is very sparse throughout mid Wales, and so it is hard to draw interpretations. Nevertheless, we can note that the artefact assemblage from the New Pieces (Montgomeryshire) defended settlement included imports, late Roman ceramics and two styli, thus suggesting continuity of high status occupation (Edwards and Lane 1988, 97–98; Campbell 2007). In north Wales, however, all the sites thus far identified as post-Roman power centres also reveal high-status occupation during the late Roman period. In most cases these sites are hillforts. As we have seen, Dinorben has produced one of the largest and richest late Roman artefact assemblages from a rural settlement in north Wales. Imported wares were not recovered (they appear not to have distributed much further east than the River Conway), but evidence for high status occupation in the post-Roman period includes a fragment of copper-alloy rimbinding, a seventh-century Anglo-Saxon strap-end and three radiocarbon dates spanning the late third to early seventh centuries AD (Edwards and Lane 1988,

65–66). Alcock's excavations at Degannwy recovered a rich late Roman assemblage, evidence for a drystone rampart and sherds of imported amphorae (Alcock 1967; Edwards and Lane 1988, 50–53). Dinas Emrys (Caernarfonshire), also with drystone-built defences, featured a good late Roman assemblage that included colour-coated pottery, glass vessels, late fourth-century calcite gritted jars, as well as imported ware; but it is difficult to determine whether all this represented domestic or religious/ritual activity (Savory 1960; Edwards and Lane 1988, 54–57) (Fig. 11.6).

We also see evidence for continuity at non-hillfort sites and lower status rural settlements in north Wales, particularly on Anglesey. A Type H penannular brooch from Pant-y-Saer (Anglesey) and radiocarbon dates from Ty Mawr (Anglesey) suggest that some late Roman enclosed hut-groups continued to be occupied (Smith 1987; Edwards and Lane 1988, 99–101). Moreover, a sherd of D ware, a Byzantine intaglio and a Type G penannular brooch from Cefn Cwmwd (Anglesey) points to some unenclosed settlements also persisting. Interestingly, the high-status nature of the post-Roman finds at this site were mirrored by the Roman assemblage, which included pottery, glass beads, a shale bracelet, and a hoard of ten late third-century *sestertii* and *antoniniani* (Cutler *et al.* 2012, 30, 154–160).

The sites discussed above are a small sample from which to draw interpretations, and the crucial period between 360 and 450 remains poorly understood. However, we can make some valuable observations. Firstly, we can point to a general disjuncture in settlements patterns, both urban and rural, across Wales between the mid-/late fourth and late fifth centuries. Many, perhaps most, rural settlements appear to have been abandoned by the mid-fifth century, and urban occupation of towns did not outlive the early fifth century. However, there was a greater level of continuity, both in terms of settlement location and status/function in the north and west than there was in the south and east of Wales. Thus, we see a broad correlation between the level of disjuncture, the intensity of the Romano-British rural economy and the level of Romanisation. Interestingly, these are patterns that are repeated in neighbouring parts of south-west England: in Romanised Somerset there is comparatively limited evidence for high-status fourth-century occupation at the major post-Roman defended centres at South Cadbury and Cadbury Congressbury (Rahtz *et al.* 1992; Alcock 1995); whereas in Devon and Cornwall, which were much less Romanised, settlements such as Tintagel, Trethurgy and Grambla show greater evidence for continuity of status and function (Barrowman *et al.* 2007; Quinnell 2004).

Before moving onto consider how we may account for these patterns we need to examine how the wider agrarian landscape changed across the late and post-Roman periods. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of animal bone and plant macrofossil assemblages from settlements, thereby hindering coherent assessment of diachronic



Figure 11.6 Dinas Emrys hillfort (Caernarvon) from the south-west. High status objects of late- and post Roman from limited excavations suggest that the hilltop was continuously occupied between the fourth and sixth or seventh centuries (© Crown copyright: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. © Hawlfraint y Goron: Comisiwn Brenhinol Henebion Cymru)

changes in land-use and agriculture (Smith *et al.* 2016, 380). This problem is exacerbated by a lack of well-dated offsite palaeoenvironmental sequences from core areas of settlement. Nevertheless, a recent synthesis of all of the available pollen evidence for Wales in combination with intensive study of the area surrounding Lake Bala (Caernarfonshire) suggests that between the fifth and eighth centuries there was a general decline in the proportion of arable indicator species and an associated increase in woodland and pastoral indicator species (Davies 2015). Although imperfect, the evidence should signify that the rural economy across Wales underwent a process of abatement after the end of Romano-British administration in which some farmland reverted to wood and a more extensive pastoral-orientated rural economy developed (cf Faith 2009). Such a process is compatible with the changes observed in the settlement evidence and further supports the idea of a disjuncture at or soon after the end of Roman control.

Settlement and Rural Economy in Late Antique Wales

These changes in rural settlement and economy must have been associated with a range of factors. In some cases,

specific circumstances must have led to the abandonment of settlements. For example, the excavators of the Whitton villa suggested that it was abandoned c. AD 340 because its well dried up (Jarrett and Wrathmell 1981, 100). More generally, local settlement drift and the apparent decline in Britain's population during the fifth and sixth centuries must have entailed a (perhaps slow) abandonment and/or downsizing of many rural settlements. The arrival of intrusive Irish groups in parts of south and north Wales that is seen most clearly in the distribution of ogham and Irish personal names on fifth- and sixth-century memorial stones, may have also disrupted settlement patterns (Charles-Edwards 2013, 174–181). However, these cannot account for the regional patterns observed or the fact that majority of changes appear to have taken place before the late fifth century. Nor would they explain the growing preference for defended settlements in the post-Roman period. In order to explore these issues better we need to consider how (and how quickly) settlements and the rural economy were affected by the socio-political transformations brought about by the end of imperial control in Britain.

Over the considerable period of Roman rule the rural landscapes of southern Britain evolved in unison with the demands of the imperial economy, albeit in ways that

were influenced by local and regional circumstances. The rural landscape was part of a *mode of production*, and, as we have seen, settlement hierarchies were conditioned by both economic relationships and ideologies of power and systems of social reproduction. Thus, there was a rationale to the late Roman rural landscape, and changes to the *status quo* would have brought about significant transformations. In Britain the end of Roman administration around AD 406–409 was associated with the rapid breakdown of taxation and State administration, urbanism, large-scale industrial production, craft specialisation, long distance exchange, and the removal of a professional army. Indeed, early fifth-century Britain has recently been characterised as a ‘collapsed state’ (Esmonde Cleary 2011). In south-east Wales the evidence points to an intensive arable-focused late Roman rural economy, and systems of social reproduction that drew heavily upon *Romanitas* and the culture of *paideia*. Thus, when the Romano-British provincial structure was removed, the infrastructures that supported these systems were undermined and could not be replaced from within (Esmonde Cleary 1989, 138–141; Wickham 2005, 306–309; Halsall 2007, 351). This collapse removed a major stimulus to agricultural production, particularly on the imperial estates. Hence, in south-east Wales, and across much of lowland southern Britain, the fifth century witnessed not only the breakdown of State and aristocratic power structures, but also a shift to a less intensive, ‘abated’ pastoral-focused economy (Faith 2009). This would have affected the way that the rural landscape operated, and we can expect there to have been a significant reorganisation of settlement patterns; some areas were perhaps abandoned as communities adjusted to an economic environment in which heavy State-driven taxation was no longer a stimulus to production.

The top of the settlement hierarchy was also heavily impacted. Firstly, *Romanitas* lost its role as a marker of elite status, thus undermining the ideological significance of Romanised settlement forms (cf Wickham 2009, 106). Secondly, after the collapse of the mass production, elites struggled to secure the materials and specialists needed to build and maintain villas or to generate prestige items. Thirdly, the breakdown of political institutions and loss of a professional army necessitated a greater need for localised security and defences, thus encouraging a movement away from low-lying and ‘open’ locations. While we might anticipate that the defended Roman towns became enhanced foci, this is not the case, perhaps because of the large size of the garrison that would have been needed to defend and maintain them.

Over the course of the fifth and sixth centuries, therefore, the rural landscapes of Wales adjusted to a new set of socio-political and economic conditions. With the old sources of authority gone, pathways to local and regional power were established through the forging of systems of clientship and patronage between rulers and largely independent

local populations. Thus, it has been argued that the former Romano-British administrative elites returned to the core of their territories and attempted to establish power through patronage and protection, intimidation and violence, feasting and the circulation of gifts (Halsall 2007, 351, 366–370). Control over land was crucial and if individuals could gain control of territory and resources (e.g. cattle, sheep) they could cede parts as gifts to clients who would be bound to reciprocate through loyalty, military service and hospitality (Wickham 2005, 330–331). By conceding territory in this way elites created client/patron relationships that established them as local rulers. However, the lack of institutionalised State structures and a full-time army meant that these power structures were inherently weak, and post-Roman rulers were not able to control large territories (Seaman 2013, 17–19). These ‘small worlds’ were foreshadowed by late Roman antecedents (see Van Dam 1985, 13–14), but, as Gerrard (2013, 248–252) has noted, there a major ideological shift during the fifth century and few elements of elite culture survived completely intact, especially in exposed former frontier provinces. There would have been no place for villas in these small worlds, and hillforts such as Dinas Powys were a manifestation of power structures that were no longer dependent upon Roman idioms or enforced by Roman law. The apparent sparsity of hillforts in comparison to villas may be a reflection of biases in discovery, but the fact that local power was becoming consolidated within particular dynasties, rather than a wider aristocratic class, may also have been significant.

The process in the north and west of Wales, where levels of Romanization were lower, was quite different. As we have seen these areas were no less a part of the Roman Empire, but they were integrated into the imperial system in a different way to much of lowland southern Britain. Given that the establishment of the military garrison had brought about an increase in the number of settlements in the second century AD (Smith *et al.* 2016, 380–384), it should not be surprising that its removal prompted the abandonment of some sites in the late fourth/fifth century. Yet the key difference between the north and west of Wales and the south-east lay at the top of the settlement hierarchy: the late Roman native elite in these areas had never participated fully in the aristocratic culture of the late Roman West, and while they paid taxes and probably collected taxes, systems of social reproduction were largely framed by long-established native idioms (Hingley 1989, 146). Thus, the kinship relationships, personal alliances and ideologies that underpinned socio-political relationships in the post-Imperial world did not have to be established *de novo*. In an area in which the Empire directly controlled land and governance, the end of Romano-British administration would have generated significant socio-political upheaval, and we can envisage an ensuing power vacuum in which elites, including natives, Irish incomers, and what remained of the military, competed, perhaps violently, for control

of land and resources. Indeed, since there was probably a reduction in the size of the military garrison in Wales in the early 390s, perhaps as a consequence of the revolt of Eugenius in 392 (Burnham and Davies 2010, 64), this process may have begun before the conventional end of Roman administration. Nevertheless, because the elite were less dependent upon the efficacy of the imperial system, they would have been in a comparatively strong position from which to negotiate this period of turmoil. Moreover, a less intensive rural economy, and settlement hierarchy that was largely native in character provided greater scope for continuity of settlement patterns.

Conclusions

Wales was not part of a monolithic 'military zone' that encompassed much of upland western Britain south of Hadrian's Wall. The albeit limited archaeological evidence shows that the coastal strip of south-east Wales was part of the 'civilian zone' of lowland southern Britain, and while the north and west were not as Romanised they were no less a part of the Roman world. The archaeology of the fifth and sixth centuries should be seen in the light of changes that were already taking place during the fourth and without the benefit of hindsight the pace and extent of change may not have been as dramatic as is sometimes presumed. It is certainly true that elements of continuity can be identified, but the overriding impression is one of discontinuity, and of the landscapes and peoples of Wales changing dramatically when Britain ceased to be part of the Western Empire. The disruption was felt most heavily in the south-east where the fortunes of the late Roman elite were tied closely to that of the Romano-British State: here the fifth century witnessed the end of urbanism and a major disjuncture in settlement patterns and the way the rural economy operated. In the much less populated north and the west there were greater opportunities for continuity, but the fifth and sixth centuries were not times for 'business as usual' and communities had to adjust to a very different socio-political and economic environment.

The evidence from Wales supports the growing consensus that the changes that characterised western Europe between the fifth and eighth centuries cannot be attributed to barbarian migration alone, and that the parts of southern Britain that were not subject to Anglo-Saxon settlement were not characterised by a continuation of Romano-British social, cultural and economic systems. Patterns of change are better explained in terms of regional economic systems, patterns of land-ownership, and the extent to which power structures were integrated into the Roman world system (Wickham 2003). However, as highlighted, one of the most striking features of this period in Wales is the sheer lack and ephemeral nature of the archaeological evidence. This remains an important caveat, but I hope to have

demonstrated here that it is still possible to draw out regional contrasts that are very much worthy of wider consideration.

Note

- 1 Sites are located in post-1974 counties.

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Military Might for a Depopulated Region? Interpreting the Archaeology of the Lower Rhine Area in the Late Roman Period

Stijn Heeren

Setting the Scene: From *Germania Inferior* to *Germania Secunda* and Beyond

From the first to third century AD, modern-day Netherlands south of the Rhine, the adjacent German Rhineland and north-eastern Belgium belonged to the Roman province of *Germania Inferior*. The province most likely had six *civitates*, of which five are relatively well known: the Agrippinensis around Cologne, the Traianensis with the capital at Xanten, the Tungri with Tongres as its centre, the Batavians around Nijmegen and the Cananefates with a capital at Voorburg, close to modern The Hague (Bogaers 1972; Raepsaet-Charlier 2002–2003). Apart from official cities and secondary centres, the settlements in the countryside of this province are especially well researched. Villas, which usually comprise several stone buildings, form the majority of rural settlements in the fertile loess areas in the south of the province, while non-villa units consisting of two-aisled wooden byre-houses are the norm in the northern zone, which is dominated by sandy soils and riverine clay (Roymans 1996; Vos 2009; Heeren 2009; Habermehl 2013; Roymans *et al.* 2015).

Previous research has shown that many rural sites remained active into the late third century (Heeren 2015). Mainly in German archaeology a ‘Limesfall’, in other words a complete and definitive abandonment of the Roman frontier defences and places in its direct hinterland, around AD 260 or 270–275, is assumed. For the Lower Rhine frontier, however, this does not seem to be the case: burnt deposits are in fact absent and new numismatic analyses indicate that a continued military presence is very likely (Heeren 2016).

This situation changed dramatically when the Tetrarchs decided on a reorganisation of provinces in AD 293 (see Corcoran 1996). With regard to the Low Countries, this was

executed by a visit of Constantius Chlorus (father of the later emperor Constantine I), between AD 293 and 297. His visit is in fact presented by the Panegyrics as a military campaign in which he liberated Batavia and the Scheldt mouth from Frankish invaders (*Pan. Lat.* VIII, 5; De Boone 1954, 58). But we can also observe large-scale revisions activated: thus civilian centres like Voorburg (*Forum Hadriani*) and Nijmegen-Waterkwartier (*Ulpia Noviomagus*) were completely abandoned, while fortifications were erected at Nijmegen-Valkhof and Cuijk (Van Enckevort and Thijssen 2002; De Jonge *et al.* 2006; Willems *et al.* 2009). At Xanten, Tongres and Jülich new defensive circuits were set around a reduced core (*enceinte réduite*) (Otten and Ristow 2008; Perse 2015; Vanderhoeven 2017). But most strikingly, we can see how the countryside of some regions suddenly becomes completely abandoned; the evidence for this depopulation is presented in the next section. Archaeologically these changes are dated to either the Tetrarchy or else the very early reign of Constantine; either way they probably can be connected to the reorganisation of the province. As a result, *Germania Inferior* became *Germania Secunda* and the *Notitia Galliarum* explicitly states that this province had two districts: the *Tungrian civitas* (Tongres) and the Agrippinensian metropolis, modern Cologne (Seeck 1876/1962) (see Fig. 12.1).

In the *Notitia Dignitatum* of c. AD 425, a list of state officials and mainly military commands, a page for *Germania Secunda* is missing. This has sometimes been crudely explained as the result of haste or scribal errors (see Scharff 2005, 298–300). But the most likely option is that a page is missing because defence of the frontier had been entrusted to foreign and independent *foederati*. Since these units were not part of the regular army, so they are not listed in the *Notitia*. This option was in fact suggested



Figure 12.1 *Germania Secunda* and surrounding provinces in the fourth and early fifth centuries. Numbers refer to regions shown in Fig. 12.3

some time ago by ancient historians (e.g. Hoffmann 1973, 15, following Nesselhauf), and recently backed up by archaeological indications for immigrants of Germanic descent in the area (Heeren 2017).

Archaeologically, the immigration of foreign fighters and their families is dated to the late fourth or early fifth century. Some of their newly founded settlements are dated quite precisely by felling dates of the wood used to construct wells between AD 401–403 (see below). Most likely there is a connection to the withdrawal of Roman forces to northern Italy in 401–402 by Stilicho, in order to defend the emperor besieged by Gothic armies (Claudianus, *de Bello Gothico*, 419–429; Stein 1928, 378). When removing all the Roman army units from the Rhine, the generalissimo Stilicho undoubtedly made arrangements for retaining some control of the frontier line, in the form of allied groups taking the watch. This may have been a temporary measure but one that soon became fixed. Just a few years later, the usurper Constantine III further employed these groups as *foederati* (Roymans 2017; Heeren 2017).

In light of these circumstances, the end of effective Roman rule for the northern part of *Germania Secunda* is dated to 401–402. The southern area, meaning the Agrippinensian and Tungrian *civitates* south of the Cologne-Bavay road, remained a part of the empire for several decades after.

Depopulation and Transformations

Many of the settlements made up of wooden byre-houses have a similar occupation history which involves a foundation around the start of the first millennium AD, a peak in the late first or early second century, and a slow decline into the late third century (Heeren 2009, 49–74; Vos 2009, 89–99). Subsequent evidence for the early and middle part of the



Figure 12.2 The development of the cemetery and settlement of Tiel-Passewaaij (after Heeren 2009; Heeren and Aarts 2011; re-dating of the Late Roman phase in Heeren 2017)

fourth century is very scarce or even non-existent, although in some sites a re-occupation occurs in the very late fourth or early fifth century. The complex of Tiel-Passewaaij, where several settlements and a cemetery were excavated, serves as an example in the Dutch river area (Fig. 12.2).

This sequence is similar for many settlements and is based primarily on dendrochronological dates for well construction mostly, only very rarely for the farmhouses themselves, and secondly on *mobilia* (e.g. coins, brooches and pottery) or material culture found in the settlements and any related cemeteries. Radiocarbon dates are rare and generally not of sufficient precision to contribute much. The dendrochronological dates listed in Table 12.1 show building activities into the 240s and maybe the 250s, followed, as noted, by new foundations in the 390s.

Table 12.1 Dendrochronological felling dates of timber used in water wells in the Lower Rhine area (after Heeren 2017)

Excavation	Dendrochronological date
Nederweert-Rosveld	AD 211–212
Wijnegem	after AD 214 (+5)
Venray-Hoogrieboek	AD 230
Deurne-Groot Bottelsche Akker	AD 236
Veldhoven-Zilverackers (Oerle Zuid)	AD 235–236
Breda-West, Huifakker	after AD 232
Breda-West, Huifakker	after AD 239
Reusel-Kruisstraat	AD 242
Hoogeloon-Kerkackers	after AD 227 (244)
Best-Aarle	AD 254/255
Herk-de-Stad, Donk	after AD 383
Hambach 500	AD 393 (±5)
Bergeijk	after AD 396; repair AD 402
Alphen-Kerkackers	AD 401–403
Gennep-Stamelberg	after AD 390
Gennep-Stamelberg	AD 408
Valburg-Molenzicht	AD 418 (±6)
Meldert-Zelemsebaan	after AD 422
Breda-West, Steenakker	after AD 465
<i>North of the limes</i>	
Didam-Kerkwijk	AD 321 (±6)
Heeten-Hordelman	after AD 316
Heeten-Hordelman	AD 335/336

For the *mobilia*, it is important to comment on the use of coin dates and ceramics dating. In past decades, the end of a coin list was too often interpreted as the end of habitation at a site. Yet the supply of fresh coin was very unstable: the ‘Soldier-emperors’ of the mid-third century, for instance, reigned only very briefly or were in the field mostly, and consequently they struck limited amounts of coin; in the late third century, the last Soldier-emperors and Tetrarchs did strike elevated numbers of coins but these were distributed in the East and barely reached the north-west provinces; in fact, in this period, older coins kept circulating in these frontier zones. Therefore, an absence of certain coins does not automatically mean the cessation of coin circulation and therefore site abandonment (Stribny 1989; Kropff and Van der Vin 2003) – although such connections are still made. Moreover, many ceramic and brooch types were previously dated with reference to the assumed ‘Limesfall’: thus literature on the dating of material culture is littered with the end-date of AD 260 or 270/275, all based on the

coin-based assumption of sites terminating around this date. Once the basic assumption of stable coin supply is dropped and the lack of burnt layers is combined with the realisation that old coinage filled the gap of interrupted or failed/minimal supply, so the ‘Limesfall’ is concluded to be an unsubstantiated theory. Material culture of the so-called Niederbieber horizon needs to be re-dated to cover the late third century as well (Heeren 2016).

Coins were struck by the government of Constantine I again in high numbers and distributed widely. At sites with ample activity in the early fourth century, like Tongres (Vanderhoeven 2017) and Nijmegen-Valkhof area (Steures 2012), issues of his reign are very numerous, as are those from the subsequent Valentinianic period. In this period of ubiquitous coinage, the absence of coins at a site is indeed significant, and discontinuous use must be considered an option in this case.

Many sites in the Dutch river area and also in the southern sandy soils of the area between the rivers Meuse Demer and Scheldt show a decrease in number of farmsteads from the second century but pottery as well as coins from the second half of the third century are present at these. In the Dutch river area coins, brooches and pottery of the late third century are observed at both military and rural sites, indicating occupation continuing into the very late third century. However, Constantinian coins at rural sites are almost wholly lacking in either of the areas mentioned (Heeren 2015), except for a few sites such as Wijchen and Ewijk where former villas were probably transformed into fortified *burgi*. At Wijchen the main building of the second or third century was too damaged to reconstruct, but a well-house of that period was re-used as a *burgus* tower in the fourth century. In the early fifth, the tower was surrounded by sunken-huts and cemeteries with burials containing military belts developed both to the north and east (Heeren and Hazenberg 2010; Heirbaut and Van Enckevort 2011). The villa of Ewijk is perhaps comparable: while the main building could not be investigated, surface finds of architectural fragments in rare marble support the interpretation of the remains as a prestigious complex; the presence of high numbers of fourth-century coins and several crossbow brooches imply a military re-use of the remains in the fourth century (Blom *et al.* 2012).

Archaeologists usually argue that *absence of evidence* is not the same as *evidence of absence*. There are, however, additional argument for the position that in the Dutch river area and the Dutch-Belgian Meuse-Demer-Scheldt area, occupation of the countryside largely disappeared in the fourth century. Besides no dendrochronological dates or *mobilia* for the early and middle part of the fourth century, built structures of the period are absent whereas later ones are present. In the case of a top layer of dark earth or, for instance, a destroyed upper stratigraphy, one could argue that more recent structures have been lost. In the case of

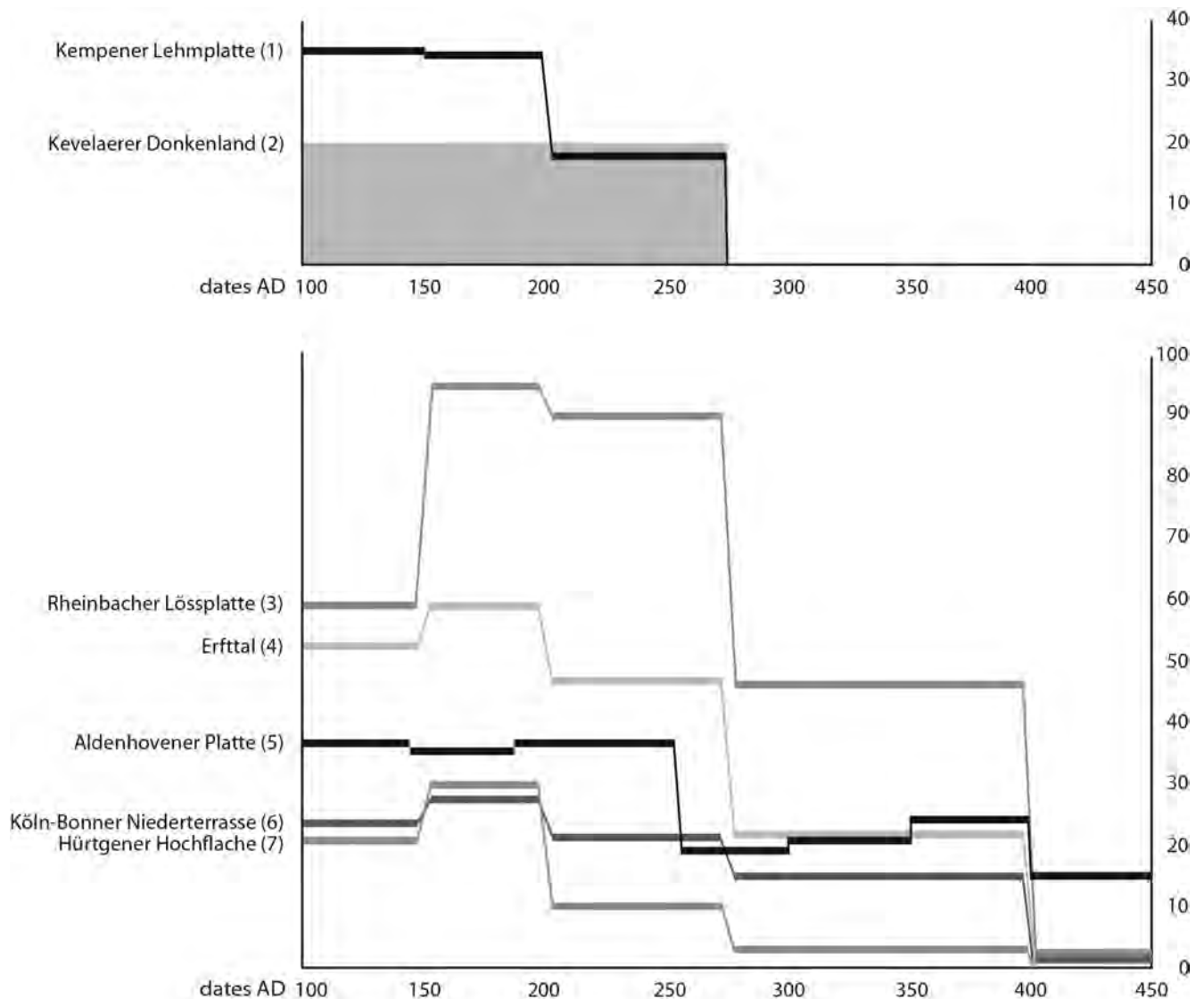


Figure 12.3 Development of the number of settlements per region within the study area. (Aldenhovener Platte after Lenz 1999; others after Gechter and Kunow 1986. Kevelaerer Donkenland: only estimates). Region numbers refer to the map of Fig. 12.1.

settlements like Tiel-Passewaaij (Fig. 12.2) and Breda-West, house plans dated to c. AD 400 can be traced (Berkvens and Taayke 2004; Heeren 2017); but these lack any evident features belonging to the early and middle part of the fourth century. A contrast comes with sites north of the Rhine where dendrochronology does identify early and mid-fourth-century activities (see Table 12.1).

The large-scale rural abandonment as described for the Dutch river area and Meuse-Demer-Scheldt area, which were non-villa landscapes, is less complete for the villa landscapes of the Rhineland in the hinterland of Cologne and for the Belgian Hesbaye region. For these areas, two subjects can be discussed: the numbers of settlement sites per region and types of villa transformations.

Several quantitative studies concerning the number of active sites in the Cologne hinterland are available. Of older

date but still useful is the study of Gechter and Kunow (1986), who used pottery from fieldwalking campaigns and excavations as a proxy for the habitation history of several regions. Thus, the Kevelaerer Donkenland and Kempener Lehmplatte, set north of the road from Tongres to Cologne (Fig. 12.1), show decreasing site numbers from the second to the third century and a complete absence of sites in the fourth century (Fig. 12.3, top). Regions south of the road, like the Cologne-Bonner Niederterrasse, the Rheinbacher Lössplatte and the Hürtgener Hochfläche, show survival rates (the number of fourth-century villas compared to early third-century ones) of 71%, 52% and 30% respectively (Fig. 12.3). For the Aldenhovener Platte, Lenz (1999) argues that the decrease was found to have set in already around the middle of the third century, but this is followed by a gradual rise in number of sites in the late

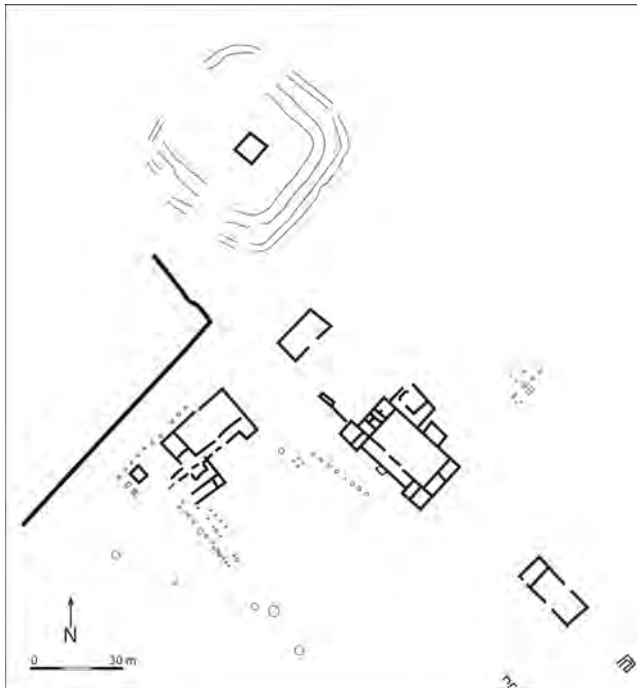


Figure 12.4 Excavation plan of the villa of Rheinbach-Flerzheim. The *burgus* surrounded by ditches was added in the third century (after Van Ossel 1992)

third, early fourth and later fourth century. The number of early fourth-century villas (21) is 56% of the number of early third-century sites.

In terms of types of site-transformations, what has been termed as marking the ‘survival rate’ in the cited surveys might simply be the presence of late material culture at a villa site of the second/third century, indicating some activity, without the nature of the later activities being addressed. More challenging therefore was the study by Van Ossel (1992) of the late Roman phases of villa complexes in the north of Gaul; here he noted several processes at work: only a very few villas of the second to third century experienced continued usage or even new building activities in provincial-Roman style in the fourth century across the whole of northern Gaul; if the complexes featured some form of continuity, then the late Roman phase often showed considerable alterations of morphology and function.

At several sites, towers for defence, sometimes interpreted as *Speichertürme* (granary-towers) were added to the complex. In the case of Cologne-Braunsfeld such a tower was added to the main building, whereas in Cologne-Müngersdorf a secondary building was transformed into fortified storage. The growing need for security is also reflected in the addition of *burgi*, small towers surrounded by V-shaped ditches, positioned between the secondary buildings, as seen at, for instance, Rheinbach-Flerzheim (Van Ossel 1992, 163–168) (Fig. 12.4). An earlier example, where no less than three different *burgi* subsequently guarded

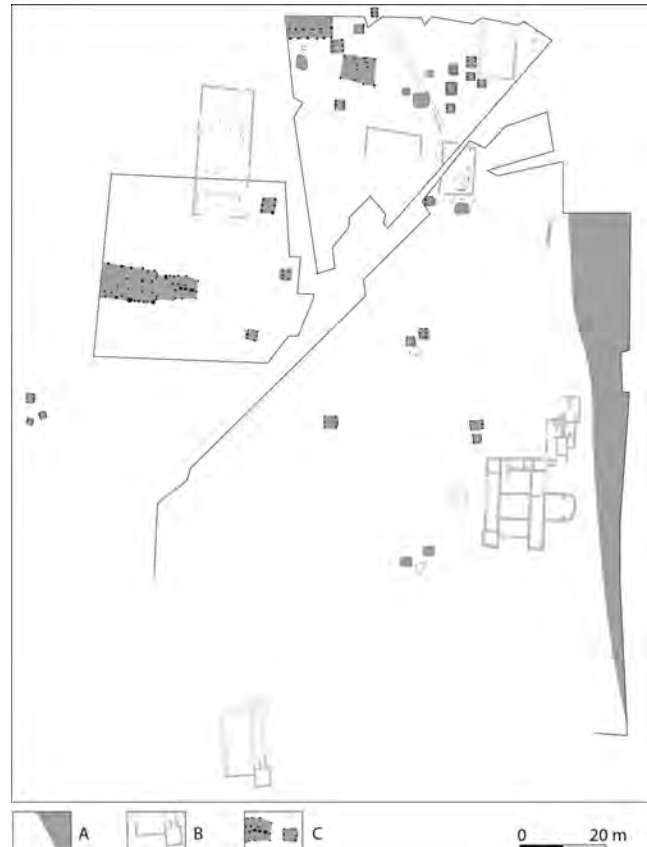


Figure 12.5 The development of the site of Neerharen-Rekem. A: Riverside. B: Stone buildings of the second/third century. C: Wooden farmhouses and sunken-feature buildings of the fourth/fifth century (after De Boe 1983)

several roads near a villa, is the case of Froitzheim: these *burgi* were dated to the period of the Gallic Empire, with a probable second phase in the mid-fourth century, although it is not certain whether or not the villa itself still functioned by then (Barfield 1968).

A different form of transformation is the appearance of new building activities in a different building style, namely post-hole buildings and sunken-huts, imposed at former villa sites of the second/third century. A well-known example is Neerharen-Rekem, where the main building burned down in the third century and the site ‘colonised’ by sunken-huts and farmhouses of a northern style in the second half of the fourth century (De Boe 1983; on the dating: Stroobants 2013) (see Fig. 12.5). The often implicit associations with social impoverishment connected to timber-built farmsteads and sunken-huts were proven wrong once the settlement of Saint-Ouen-de-Breuil was published, where a gold hoard was found in a settlement consisting of post-built three-aisled farmhouses (Van Ossel 2006, 545–547). Post-built farmhouses in combination with sunken-huts are often associated with immigrants from across the Rhine and evidence has come to light to support this interpretation

(Heidinga and Offenbergh 1992, 39, 66; but critical is Theuvs 2008; and argued on different grounds by Heeren 2017).

One last form of transformation to note is the use of former villa spaces as a location for pottery or glass workshops (Van Ossel 1992, 151–159; Brüggler 2009). There are also instances of churches or Merovingian cemeteries established at former villa sites in our study area, but these do not come before a discontinuous use of more than a century and so are not considered here.

Although the morphological changes from the second/third century to the fourth/fifth century can be sketched out as above, questions of property ownership and production are much harder to answer. Whether or not some of these villa complexes and their lands still produced an agrarian surplus, cannot be ascertained in the current state of knowledge. Equally uncertain is the matter of ownership: did the complexes remain in the hands of wealthy aristocrats, but with these perhaps having relocated to defended towns? The fact that different inhabitants of probable Germanic descent built new homes in the inner courtyards is often interpreted as ‘squatter occupation’, implying a silent assumption that the previous villa owners did not control their properties any more. It is, however, also possible that a different workforce laboured there, while the ownership remained in the same hands as in the centuries before (Van Ossel 2006, 548–558).

Military Transformations

At a general level, two interconnected military transformations are recognised in the Late Roman period. Until the second century, the Roman army was divided into legions and *auxilia*. Although the legions had some cavalry and separate auxiliary cavalry units existed, by far the bulk of the early imperial army comprised infantry. In the tumultuous third century speed became much more important to generals moving from one threatened region to another and cavalry duly gained importance. By the fourth century, the army was divided into territorial armies called *limitanei* (‘border troops’) or *ripensis* (‘riverbank’ or ‘waterside troops’) on the one hand, and *comitatenses* (field armies), often interpreted as quick-reaction forces stationed in the interior provinces, on the other (Brulet 1995a, 2017; Southern and Dixon 1996, 39–66).

Related to the new organisation of the army, the nature of the frontier defences changed as well. Although the Roman concept of *limes* had always been that of a broad frontier zone (cf Whittaker 1994), the physical defences from the first to third century were more or less linear, a single line of defences. In the late third and fourth century, defences in the hinterland were developed, in the form of walled towns and a new type of smaller military defence station (Brulet 1995b; Southern and Dixon 1996, 127–147). In the case of barbarian raids, *limitanei* would signal back notice of the attack and seek to slow down or hinder the invading force in various places, while the field army forces would

be directed towards the threatened region to repulse or extinguish the intruders. This system is often called ‘defence in depth’ and is variously seen as a new and conscious strategy of the Roman military command or otherwise as a *de facto* adaption of defences to a changing way of fighting (i.e. small- to medium-scale raids at diverse fronts) and the need to defend the frontiers with fewer forces against larger threats (Brulet 2017, with references).

In the Lower Rhine area, more specifically in *Germania Secunda* and parts of *Belgica Secunda*, such defence in depth can be recognised in three military transformations. Firstly, the Lower Rhine defences are reduced in the fourth century compared to the third-century situation. Not too long ago, even the existence of the Lower Rhine *limes* was questioned: an inaugural speech in 2003 by Erdrich discussed the matter at length and argued for a Roman presence along the Rhine and Waal rivers rather than accepting it right away. Of the approximately 38 fortifications known to be active in the late second/early third century from Krefeld-Gellep in the Rhineland to the Dutch coast, an estimated 15 likely still functioned in the fourth century. At the Middle Rhine in modern Germany, many fortifications are demonstrably occupied: Bonn, Remagen, Cologne-Deutz, Dormagen, Haus Bürgel, Neuss (riverside *burgus*), Krefeld-Gellep, Xanten (*Tricensimae*), Qualburg (see Brulet 1995a). In the current Netherlands the list grows thin: Nijmegen, Valkenburg and the Brittenburg have recognisable Late Roman plans. At *Carvium* (Bijlandse Waard), Driel, Wijkbij Duurstede, Vechten and Leiden-Roomburg the presence of late Roman finds could well indicate further garrison posts.

In the hinterland, the former civilian infrastructure along the River Maas was transformed into a military line. The *vicus* of Cuijk and the sanctuary of Kessel-Lith were transferred into a *castellum*, using the monuments of earlier centuries as *spolia* in the new walls (Bogaers 1967; Roymans 2004, 134–137). These are two well-established examples, but (admittedly more ephemeral) finds at other locations suggest that this was done along the whole length of the Middle and Lower Meuse (Heeren 2015).

In between the reduced Lower Rhine defences and the added Meuse fortifications, small *burgi* guarded the roads. Heumensoord and Goch-Asperden are excavated examples and further such sites are suspected at Elst-Brienenshof and Wijchen (Brulet 1995b; Heirbaut and Van Enckevort 2011; Brüggler 2014). Central settlements like Jülich and Heerlen were furnished with an *einzeinte réduite*. For the Bavay-Tongeren-Cologne road, the addition of roadside *burgi* has long been recognised: the first of these date to the period of the Gallic Empire, while modifications were made in the later Constantinian period and/or the Valentinianic period (Brulet 1995b).

Summarising these military transformations, it seems that *Germania Secunda* was actually strengthened in our key study period. Although the Lower Rhine defences

were most likely reduced in number and in the size of the garrisons, the new defences along the River Meuse, the *burgi* and defended settlements in the hinterland made up for this reduction. Even if the numbers of units and soldiers were reduced in total (which cannot be established or denied since relevant detailed information is wholly lacking), it is evident that the region's military defence was seriously reorganised and upheld. A previously civilian infrastructure was turned into a military-controlled network of land roads and riverine routes.

The Lower Rhine Paradox

The two trends sketched out above seem to be opposed. On the one hand, widespread depopulations of the countryside were noted, with some of the *civitates* (the Cananefates, the Batavians, the northern part of the Tungrian *civitas*) depopulated completely, while the villa landscapes in the hinterland of Cologne and Tongres were at least severely reduced in terms of a civilian demographic. It seems fair to conclude that south of the main Cologne–Tongres–Bavay road there was some degree of continuity of town and countryside relations, while north of that road cities as well as rural settlements disappeared almost completely. On the other hand, we have observed an ongoing military presence as well as new investments in strongholds along the Meuse and in hinterland fortifications. How can this military strength be understood and explained given the rural voids? What were the new fortifications for, if both landscapes and civilian centres were deserted? Why would the government invest in garrisons and fortifications for an area that no longer yielded tax returns?

The Lower Rhine situation appears less paradoxical when the reasons for investment in the military infrastructure are not sought for in the same province, but looked for in an interregional framework. In particular, the importance of the Lower Rhine delta for the link between *Britannia* and the continent must be explored.

The Link between *Germania Secunda* and *Britannia*

A quick and only skin-deep comparison between *Germania Secunda* and the situation in the British provinces is enough to understand the importance of Britain for the rest of the late Roman Empire's north-western provinces.

In the earlier section on villas, the word 'decline' was not mentioned, even though it is clear that many villas stopped producing and their related lands likely quitted. Some were totally abandoned, others were fortified, continued on a lesser scale or were transformed into workshops or used as cemeteries or churches (this latter often a later imposition). Continuous use, or even extended building in a Gallo-Roman style, is very rare indeed in northern Gaul

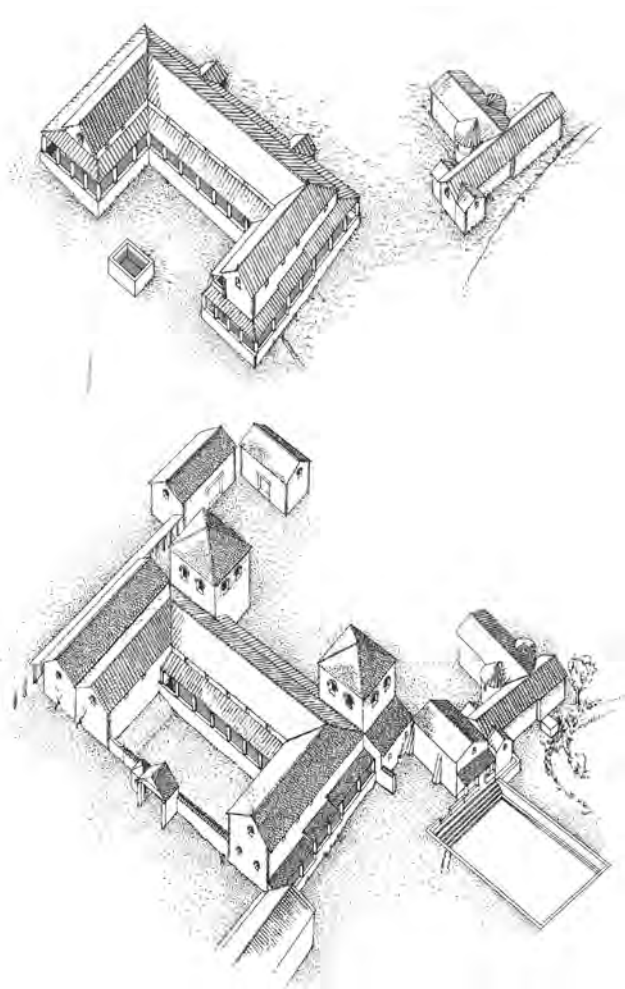


Figure 12.6 Development phases of the villa of Gadebridge Park (Hemel Hempstead). Above: Reconstruction of the villa in the late Antonine period (Neal 1974, fig. 28). Below: Reconstruction of the fourth-century villa (Neal 1974, fig. 30)

as a whole and in *Germania Secunda* in particular. How different was the situation across the English Channel? In the southern territories of *Britannia*, the fourth century is viewed as the most prosperous phase of for elite villas. Many Romano-British villas reached their peak, seeing the creation of large dining and reception spaces, elaborate mosaics, and also bathhouses increased in size (Esmonde Cleary 1989, 108; Scott 2000, 167–175; Dark 2004, 281–285). Gadebridge Park (Hemel Hempstead) is just one example of this villa development (Fig. 12.6): founded in the later first century, its Phase 3 consisted of a main dwelling and two small outbuildings, dating to the Antonine period; but in the fourth century, other outbuildings were added, the bathhouse enlarged significantly, corn-driers set up, and a substantial swimming pool built (Neal 1974).

Changes occur around the mid-fourth century in *Britannia*. While many villas, including Gadebridge Park, ceased to be used around that time, nonetheless a few very

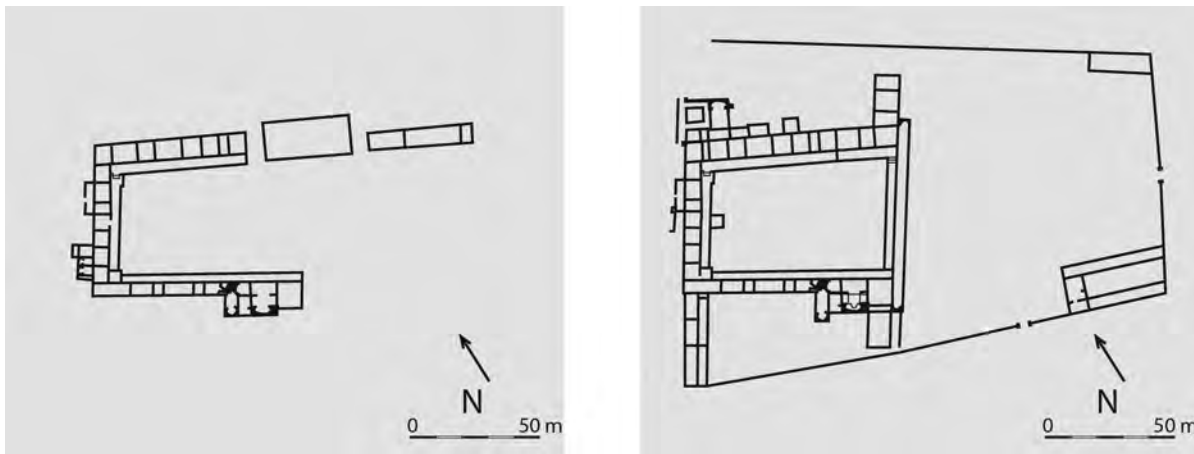


Figure 12.7 Later Roman development phases of the villa of Bignor. Left: Phase IIIA (late third to early fourth century). Right: Phase IIIB-E (first half to late fourth century) (after Frere 1982; Aldsworth and Rudling 1995)

large complexes, the so-called ‘palatial villas’, endured, which are viewed as the central complex to large estates (Dark 2004, 285–286). The transition from many smaller estates to a few substantial ones is interpreted as a process of polarisation and competition, leading to the formation of a top hierarchy; more wealth is effectively acquired by fewer landlords, many perhaps government officials (Dark 2004, 285–286). Bignor is an example of one of these larger estates (Fig. 12.7), reaching its largest extent in the first half of the fourth century and continuing to be used until the late fourth century (Frere 1982; Aldsworth and Rudling 1995; Scott 2000, 98–99).

The main reason for this villa prosperity and the wealth of their owners in the fourth century is that *Britannia* had become the granary of northern Gaul. *Britannia* may have been a grain-exporter in earlier centuries as well, but in the second and third centuries, other provinces had their own villas and productive landscapes. The Romano-British countryside continued to generate an agrarian surplus in the later third and fourth century because, unlike other provinces, it had not (yet) been plagued by barbarian attacks and internal strife. The relative isolation of *Britannia*, as well as the mild climate of at least the south, ensured a good agricultural output. The surplus in grain production was partly used to feed other provinces. Indeed, Ammianus Marcellinus tells us explicitly that the Caesar Julian II pacified the Lower Rhine area in AD 358 in order to allow the British grain fleet to pass. Julian repaired seven cities along the Rhine, built new granaries there and filled them with these (presumably regular) supplies (Amm. Marc., 18, 2, 3).

There is more evidence than just the written account of Ammianus, who is considered reliable in general but too positively biased towards Julian. In a numismatic analysis of coin finds from *Britannia* and the Rhineland, David Wigg established that the Late Roman coin spectrum of Romano-British port sites like Richborough and urban Colchester deviated from the normal spectrum found at

other of the province’s central places of the period. The proportion of coinage from Trier, Lyon and Arles being found is significantly higher in Richborough and other port sites than in inland British sites. Wigg connects this higher influx of Rhineland coinage at these sites with the grain fleets (and their related officials) to the continent (1991, 176–178; 2016, 225–226).

Excavations at the *castellum* of Valkenburg have offered direct evidence related to the storage of grain. Initially, the fourth-century phase was not recognised during the fieldwork and subsequent publications in the 1940s and 1950s. The plan of this military installation perfectly fits other plans dated to the second and early third century. However, dendrochronological analysis of foundation posts of the *principia* and two *horrea* – analyses undertaken some decades after the excavation – yielded dates in the early and mid-fourth century (Groenman-Van Waateringe 1977; Groenman-Van Waateringe and Van Beek 1988). This is surely good evidence for fourth-century repairs of key storage structures in a fortification built two centuries earlier.

It should be noted that the close connection between the Lower Rhine and Britain was not a new phenomenon in the fourth century. Throughout Roman history, reorganisations and refurbishments along the Lower Rhine had preceded campaigns to *Britannia*. Thus the founding of the Lower Rhine *limes* by Caligula, completed under Claudius, took place a few years before the conquest of *Britannia* in the early 40s AD (Graafstal 2002; Kemmers 2006). Refurbishment of the Lower Rhine *limes* road preceded Hadrian’s visit to Britain in the 120s (Hessing 1999). Before the campaigns of Septimius Severus to Britain this emperor had likewise launched a building campaign to repair the Lower Rhine’s (and other) infrastructure, as can be inferred from building inscriptions and the major repair of the harbour of *Forum Hadriani* (Polak *et al.* 2005; Driessen and Besselsen 2014). The visit of Constantius Chlorus to Batavia and the Scheldt mouth has already been considered above for its significance

for *Germania Secunda*. This move must also be seen as a preparation for the re-capture of *Britannia* for the Tetrarchy following the secession of Carausius (*Pan. Lat.* VIII, 6).

All this has important implications for reading the functions of the later Roman fortifications along the Lower Rhine and Lower Meuse. If access of grain fleets via the Rhine to *Germania Prima* and via the Meuse to *Belgica* was indeed the main reason for establishing a network of new fortifications in the late third/early fourth century, then defence against barbarians is not the main role of the new infrastructure, which is often assumed implicitly. The concept of defence in depth was already criticised on other grounds (see above and Brulet 2017). Of course, we do not have to postulate a single purpose for the fortifications: it is perfectly possible (and even probable) that the military installations along the Rhine and Meuse had a double purpose, namely as nodes in a transportation network and as strongholds for defence. Given the circumstances of a countryside largely abandoned, the first function seems to be more important than the second in the case of the Lower Rhine area.

Conclusion

I have argued above that the supply of British grain to key military and other centres in the north-west provinces of the mainland was very important to the late Roman authorities. The fact that large parts of *Germania Secunda* no longer yielded crops and taxes but that the province as a whole was maintained and an elaborate military infrastructural network was created in order to ship British grain to other provinces, is a strong indication that the various provinces were seen by the State authorities as complementary to one another.

This evidence for a strategic unity provides another paradox, however, since the Late Roman period is often seen as a period of fragmentation and regionalisation. While fragmentation was undoubtedly taking place, and this had certainly started in the fourth century for the Lower Rhine area, it follows from the above evidence that fragmentation and regionalisation were not simply caused by diminished long-distance transport. The complex relation between the seemingly ongoing official supply system, the partial (selective?) decline of long-distance trade and the enormous differences between various regions should be the subject of focussed research in the future. Similarly, more attention needs to be paid to the final phase of life and then the demise of northern *Germania Secunda* at the start of the fifth century when Rome's direct hold here was finally withdrawn.

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Landscapes of the *Limitanei* at the North-Western Edge of Empire

Rob Collins

Introduction

Current understanding of the late antique era has benefitted from a number of research projects across the former Roman Empire. But, surprisingly, the fates of Roman frontiers and their populations in Late Antiquity are still to benefit from the improved offering of methods for interrogating landscapes beyond the scale of individual sites, despite the richness of data for the Roman army, focused particularly among the frontier provinces (see the substantial edited volumes by Sarantis and Christie 2013). Yet the late Roman army was a powerful institution, and the maintenance of soldiers and frontiers was crucial to the success (or failure) of any emperor (Graham 2006; Hebblewhite 2017, 33–70). It is therefore essential that the Roman army and frontiers be integrated into our understanding of the complex world of Late Antiquity, despite their occurrence at the peripheries of empire. Frontiers should be understood as distinct landscapes, created by and sustained for the Roman army. The changing structure of the late Roman army still required soldiers to garrison the frontiers, and a holistic approach to these militarised landscapes is provided here in a case study focussed on northern *Britannia*. While no single archaeological site can provide all the required evidence, the history of investigation across a range of military installations in northern Britain presents a cohesive body of data that allows for the consideration of frontier landscapes in broad economic terms, including supply, as well as social/institutional practices of the frontier soldiers or *limitanei*. Significantly, the frontiers allow us to concurrently examine local conditions and broad super-structural changes, such as the fragmentation and collapse of the Western Roman Empire. What, we can thus ask, becomes of the frontier, when it is no longer part of the Empire it once guarded?

Frontiers as Landscapes

By the start of the fourth century AD, most of the frontiers of the Roman Empire had been geographically fixed for approximately two centuries, with the exceptions of Dacia and the Raetian *limes* (Breeze 2011). Acknowledging the antiquity or, in the minority of cases, the ‘newness’ of the frontiers or *limites* is crucial in understanding the distinct landscapes at the peripheries of the imperial State. In addition to the diverse physical geographies and climates encompassed by the *limites*, the landscapes were fundamentally created by and sustained for the Roman army: thus the army dominated and, occasionally, dictated the cultural geography of the frontiers, from the positioning of military installations to the disposition of the road network; indeed, even non-military settlement in the border provinces and in *barbaricum* was influenced by these factors.

The location of legionary fortresses, auxiliary forts and the fortlets and towers staffed by vexillations in the Principate, was a compromise between two factors: tactical value and the strategic-logistical situation. The smaller installations, such as towers, were employed for immediate tactical value, such as local landscape observation and control and for communication (Symonds 2017). Legionary fortresses and auxiliary forts were located more strategically, to provide support and reinforcement for smaller installations (where they were employed) and troop deployment, but also to take advantage of topography and infrastructure that facilitated supply – a key and constant concern for any army. When Rome’s frontiers were consolidated, primarily under emperor Hadrian, this resulted in a linear banding of the army around the provincial peripheries of the Empire, defined and reinforced by built features like Hadrian’s Wall and by natural boundaries such as the Rhine and Danube

rivers. However, it should be remembered that these were linear foci, at best offering a concentration of soldiers. Each 'frontier' was in reality a deeper zone comprising the immediate provincial hinterland, or inner frontier, as well as the extra-imperial, barbarian territories facing the *limes*, or the outer frontier (Whittaker 1994; Lattimore 1940). North Africa provides a better example of this, where the disposition of the Roman army is better understood as an amorphous branching from provincial heartlands rather than a strictly linear cordon (Rushworth 2015).

The consolidation of the frontiers as long-term, permanent, border regions for the Empire conferred two key benefits. In the first instance, army installations were (re) built in stone, providing structures suitable for long-term use. This in turn created a more permanent settlement situation, in which the broader, civilian elements of the military community could also participate and benefit. Settlements were established outside of forts and fortresses, many with a full range of temples, baths, taverns, workshops and homes. This investment in settlement ties into the second key benefit: land could be exploited and managed in a more regular fashion. The permanency of the garrison stabilised local and even regional agricultural practice, quarrying and mineral extraction, and trade in stark contrast to the disorder (sometimes chaos) induced by a transient, campaigning army. The fixed locations of soldiers therefore also fixed supply lines, making it possible to organise and forward-plan the provision of goods and materials required by the army, so contributing to the stability of each frontier zone. Merchants and traders had easier access to stable and relatively well-paid consumers in the Roman soldiery, and a fixed base facilitated transport, storage and sales of goods. Merchants, priests, and the broad range of services and industries further supported the lives of soldiers and their dependants and reduced the need to travel further afield for some goods and services.

There was a downside to fixing the position of frontiers, however. It tied the army down to known locations, providing either a clear target or known obstacle for attacking barbarians. This danger was minimised by the army in its choice of location for border fortifications. The Sahara, the Danube, and the Rhine could be substantial natural obstacles that hindered concerted barbarian attack, while forts and other installations were placed to control key points of access in the landscape. Localised or monumental fortifications reinforced these positions, as exemplified by Hadrian's Wall, and the establishment of regular patrols and the use of scouts and spies would provide advance warning of major attacks (Austin and Rankov 1995). In addition, these installations and routines acted as visible markers of the Empire and functioned interchangeably as deterrents or attractions. The concentrations of goods and services not only attracted the attentions of raiding barbarians, but also those of barbarians with more peaceful intent, and

those pulled into the economic orbit of the Empire. As Roman goods were gifted or traded across the borders into the *barbaricum*, so too did people, objects and raw materials move into the Empire from outside (Whittaker 1994, 113–121).

Late Roman frontiers have also been associated with a model of defence-in-depth (first proposed by Luttwak 1976), particularly due to the increased presence of military installations positioned along roads and at intersections in the provincial interiors, often connecting important cities with the linear, defended borders. While such interior installations and defences could and no doubt did contribute to imperial defence, especially in terms of supporting logistical arrangements, frontiers of the later Roman period were no 'deeper' or 'thicker' than in previous centuries. Throughout imperial history, the emperor and his generals employed principles of strategy and tactics to achieve 'hard power' battlefield and landscape superiority (Wheeler 1993a, 1993b), as well as using 'soft power' options such as building projects, hostage exchange, and political manipulation, including assassination (Heather 2001, 19–32). These options were used to achieve short-, medium- and long-term aims, but they were not part of a so-called 'Grand Strategy'. Defence of the periphery of Empire in the frontiers needs to be separated from the defence of the interior and, taken together, it is possible to identify overlapping defensive networks that prioritised particular territories (Brulet 2017).

The physical presence of the army significantly changed the demography of the frontiers and their related territories (inside and beyond). Added to the normal mix of slaves, free farmers, craftsmen and local elite that composed the normal provincial society were a diverse range of officers, belligerent soldiers, as well as the hordes of 'camp followers' that consisted of soldiers' dependents, merchants, and slaves, amply attested by inscriptions from the first to third centuries AD (e.g. *RIB*). Many of these civilian members of the military community lived immediately outside the fort walls in these centuries in extramural settlements known as *vici*. The outer frontier was also home to diverse barbarian groups ascribed to tribes, who often desired access to Roman goods or lands. This means that, in addition to the standard provincial elite of *curiales* and equestrians, there was an influx of equestrian and senatorial-class officers with the army, as well as barbarian chiefs, each of whom brought to bear a number of political and economic concerns backed by potential force.

Roman frontiers, then, should be understood as complex, constructed landscapes of defence. And while they were spatially peripheral to the political centre of Empire, the frontiers benefitted from an enhanced connectivity through correspondence between officials and provision of supplies (including transfers of officers and soldiers). Indeed, this supply network and the heavy financial commitment

to paying the soldiery was a material recognition that preservation of the peripheries was key for the core of the Empire.

Situating Frontiers in the Late Roman Empire

By the early fourth century, these issues were largely understood not only by the imperial court, but also the population of the Empire at large (Graham 2006). Restructuring of the government under the emperors Diocletian and Constantine and their successors reinforced the significance and functioning of the army and imperial frontiers, while at the same time diminishing the potential for either to produce usurpers. Military and civil offices and powers of government were separated; in the civil service, provinces were smaller, reducing the territorial power-base of each governor, clustered into a diocese, a number of which were overseen by praefectural offices; none of these offices conferred any military authority, meaning that they had to work with and support the army without the benefit of having their own soldiers.

The army, particularly the officer corps, became more professionalised, with officers raised through the ranks and/or ‘commissioned’ upon serving in the unofficial staff-training colleges of the *domestici* or *protectores* (Jones 1964, 636–639; Elton 1997, 101). The practice that developed during the third century of frontier-based units and praesental armies was formalised in the creation of two branches (Nicasie 1998): the *comitatenses* consisted of army forces attached to an emperor and/or praefecture with the aim of being a strategic, mobile force used for campaigns; the *limitanei* were tasked with the traditional duties of the frontier units and were static to the sector of their posting. New commands were created to oversee these new formations, with *comites* leading the field armies of *comitatenses* and *duces* (sometimes also *comites*) leading the frontier armies of the *limitanei*. The *magistri militum* were the top generals positioned above the *comites* and *duces* who maintained direct management over the entire Roman imperial army on behalf of the emperor (s), split between the Eastern and Western Empires.

The *duces* and individual unit commanders were tasked with seeing to the economic needs of the soldiers in their command as well as tactical and strategic matters, supported by the praetorian prefects and provincial governmental officials responsible for collection of the *annona militaris*, a tax directly supporting the army (Jones 1964, 458–460). Sources indicate a preference for local or regional self-sufficiency in army supply, though this was dictated to some extent by the ecological potential and limitations of each frontier zone. Olives and grapes, for example, do not grow near Hadrian’s Wall, and therefore supplies of olive oil or wine had to be imported from great distances. That said, a considerable amount of supplies could often be drawn

from the home province or region of a particular frontier, which could also draw on taxation in kind and for which good accounts have survived from the provinces of Syria and Egypt (Hopkins 1980; Alston 1995; Pollard 2000). Table 13.1 presents a basic listing of resources available locally, regionally and from further afield that can be applied to most frontier sectors of northern and western Europe. Furthermore, each fort or larger installation could draw on its associated *territorium*, effectively an ‘estate’ to provide for at least some of the core economic needs – notably staples, legumes, firewood, fodder, wool, and pasture (Bohec 2000, 219–220). These localised military estates are not well documented, and consequently poorly understood. However, it should be borne in mind that an army garrison was not merely a concentration of consumers: the army and its broader military community had considerable potential for production of (or maintenance of) materials, goods and services (Collins 2012, 57–66).

While this short overview of the structure of the late Roman army and the role of frontiers is essential, deeper understanding can be achieved through scrutiny of a border province. The frontier zone of northern *Britannia*, focused on the monumental complex of Hadrian’s Wall, offers a rich dataset for a detailed consideration of a landscape of the *limitanei* (Fig. 13.1). Northern *Britannia*, especially the Wall, has benefitted from centuries of investigation by antiquarians and archaeologists, with each successive generation enhancing knowledge with improved methods of enquiry and recording (Breeze 2014; Hingley 2012). A further benefit of selecting northern *Britannia* as a case study is that it is not entangled with debates about the extent and nature of barbarian migration and settlement that is so deeply enshrined in the historiography of the Rhine and Danube frontiers. This allows for a consideration of the Wall and its hinterlands in Late Antiquity in terms of a military-dominated landscape distinct from Gibbonian-tinted landscapes of a failing Empire.

Britannia Secunda and the Dux Britanniarum

The northern frontier of *Britannia* largely corresponds to the province of *Britannia Secunda* that covered most of present-day northern England up to Hadrian’s Wall, with the provincial capital at *Eboracum* (modern York) (Mattingly 2006, 228). Within the province, there are only three known *civitates*: at Brough-on-Humber for the Parisi, at Aldborough for the Brigantes and at Carlisle for the Carvetii; but it is possible that there were more *civitates* that are otherwise unattested. While there were also various smaller towns, these four were the foci for civilian government within the province. Villas seemingly occur almost exclusively in the south-east area of the province, in the modern counties of Yorkshire (East and North Ridings) and Teesside; this distribution corresponds to the distribution of regular, intensive, permanent arable settlement as well. Arable

Table 13.1 Local, regional, and extra-regional resources supporting the economy of a late Roman fort garrison in Britannia's northern frontier

	<i>Local</i>	<i>Regional</i>	<i>Extra-regional</i>
<i>Foods</i>	Grains Fruit & vegetables Meats Dairy Fish (possibly) Wild game & fowl Beer Fodder/hay/straw (for animals)	Grains Meats Dairy Fish Beer Salt	Olive oil Wine Spices Exotic fruits & vegetables
<i>Materials</i>	Stone Timber Thatch Bone & antler Leather Recycled metals Horses & donkeys Livestock	Timber Stone Leather Metals (Fe, Cu, Pb, etc) Horses & donkeys Livestock	Marbles Exotic woods Ivory Gold & silver
<i>Products</i>	Clothing Shoes Dress accessories Fittings Tools Weapons & armor	Clothing Shoes Dress accessories Fittings Ceramics Glass Weapons & armour	Clothing and cloths Ceramics Glass Coin Silver plate Precious metal objects
<i>Personnel</i>	Slaves & servants Labourers Farmers Weavers Leatherworkers Smiths Carpenters Masons (possibly) Recruits	Slaves & servants Weavers Leatherworkers Smiths Carpenters Masons (possibly) Potters Glassworkers Jewellers Miners Recruits	Slaves & servants (high status) Recruits Barbarian <i>laeti/foederati</i>

settlement, however, responds strongly to the physical geography of the region, which is predominantly upland, for example with the Pennines and Lake District. This is not to say that arable agriculture was limited only to the eastern

portions of the region – note, for example, the extent of prehistoric and Romano-British settlement on the Solway Plain (see Bewley 1994) – but only that the region broadly favoured upland agricultural regimes.

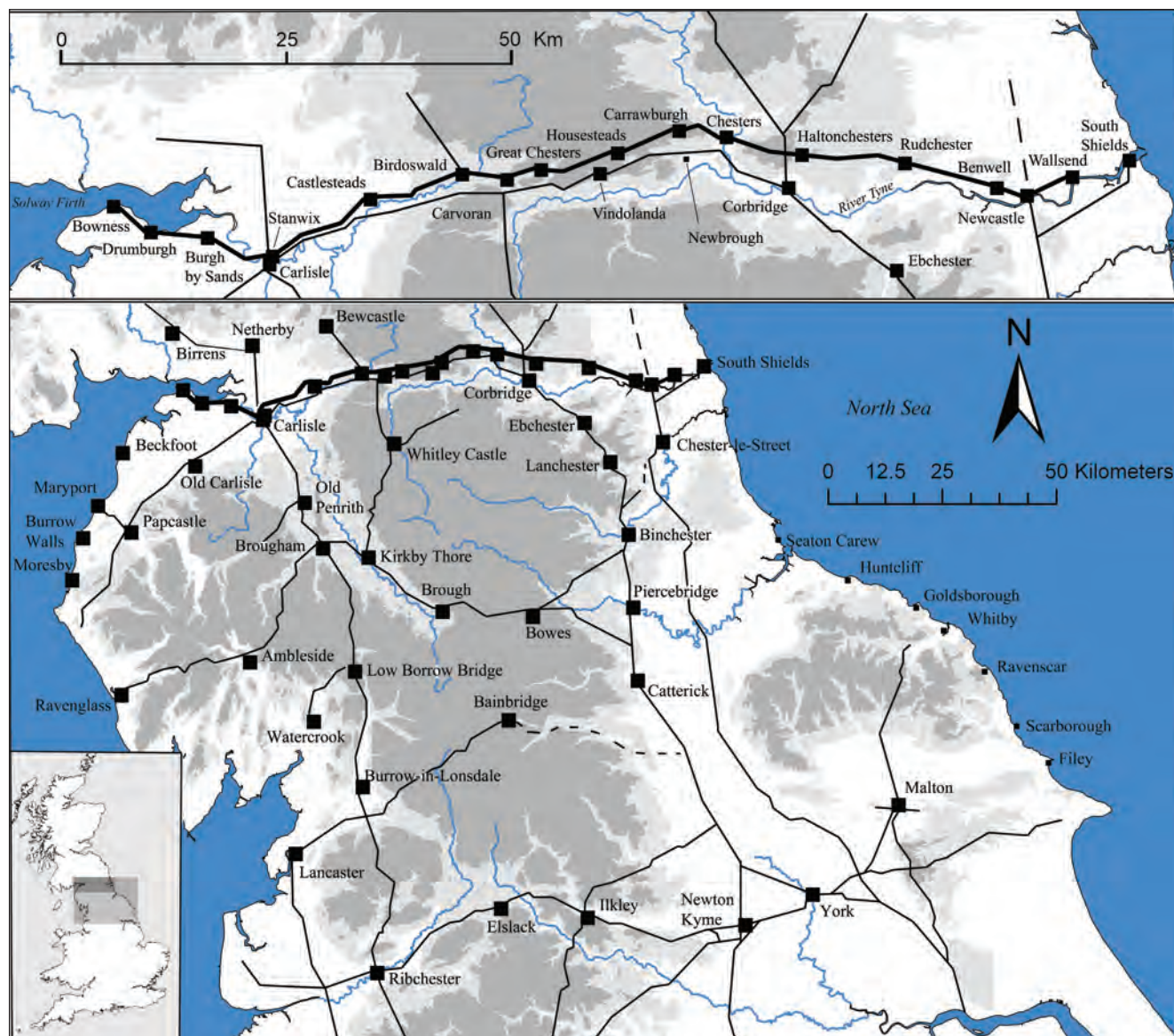


Figure 13.1 Map of the northern frontier of Britannia, with the upper panel detailing the sites along Hadrian's Wall (source: R. Collins)

Unfortunately, investigation of rural settlement has been limited, and this has to be characterised at the sub-regional scale. For example, survey and excavation in Yorkshire have provided examples of the so-called 'ladder settlements' (e.g. Wharram Grange Crossroads: Atha and Roskams 2012) as well as villas, and these compare favourably with examples from elsewhere in Britain (Smith *et al.* 2016). These rural populations had access to ceramics and other goods typical of Romano-British life; ceramic supply was dominated by the Yorkshire potteries, with the Crambeck kilns supplying fineware and an as-yet unidentified centre for the calcite-gritted coarse wares. The villa at Quarry House Farm, Ingleby Barwick, provides an exceptional example of the upper echelon of rural settlement: while the main house has not been excavated, investigation of the outbuildings

recovered fragments of an Egyptian painted glass vessel, as well as a Type 6 gold crossbow brooch (Hunter 2013, 101; Price 2013, 123–124); such objects testify that at least one member of the household was very high in the imperial network, with access to prestige goods.

Outside of the province's south-east area, identification of late Roman rural activity is problematic. Settlements appear to retain much of their pre-Roman Iron Age morphology, and activity dating to the later third century and after requires the recovery of coins, ceramics or other distinctive Roman objects; unfortunately, such objects rarely occur in rural settlements of the later Roman period. Huckhoe, a curvilinear settlement located in the hills north of Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland, is typical of sites with such scarce and imprecise evidence, having one or two sherds of ceramic

that *may* be late Roman in date (Jobey 1959). Metal-detected Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS)-data further reinforce the pattern established by more traditional archaeological investigation: thus, mapping of fourth-century coin findspots indicates a shrinking distribution of coins through the fourth century, with a tendency to cluster near larger settlements or crossroads (Collins 2012, 58–60, fig. 3.3). This pattern is evident across the entirety of *Britannia* in the fourth century, but is more exaggerated in the north and west of Britain (Walton 2012).

In contrast, there is excellent evidence for military settlement throughout the province. Military remains, particularly forts, have been the traditional focus of archaeological investigation in the Roman north (of England), and the preponderance for ceramic and coin use means that fourth-century activity can be confirmed even if not always understood in detail. Through the fourth century, there were approximately 50 active army installations, according to archaeological evidence (Collins 2012, 48–51). The *Notitia Dignitatum* (*Not. Dig. Occ.* 40) provides the names of the units based at some 40 of these installations, providing evidence that many of the garrisons had been based at the same fort since the second century, many of whose presences can be confirmed through inscriptions (Hodgson 1991). This long-term stability of unit-posting is most notable along Hadrian's Wall and the legionary fortress at York, whereas the forts lining the roads heading north to the Wall saw new units introduced at varying points in the third and fourth centuries. Unfortunately, the habit of cutting and erecting inscriptions declined dramatically from the later third century and is almost completely absent in the fourth century, making it impossible to independently verify the claims of the *Notitia*.

Command of the northern frontier was held by the *dux Britanniarum*, who was likely based in the provincial capital at York, alongside the *Legio VI Victrix*. The unit commanders reported directly to the *dux*, and the *Notitia* listed these as *praefectus* and *tribunus*. The retention of prefects and tribunes, along with the old-fashioned unit designations of *alae* and *cohortes* provides further evidence that the northern frontier was not thoroughly restructured, as seems to have been the case in other frontier sectors, notably along the Rhine and the Danube (e.g. Whately 2015). The imposition of a *dux* to create a frontier-focused and unified command seems to have been deemed sufficient for the northern British frontier. There is no surviving manual that explicitly indicates the full range of duties undertaken by a *dux*, but rulings in surviving law codes provide hints at the administrative scope of a role in addition to the defensive/military aspects, which included: maintenance of fortifications; troop recruitment; management of military lands; and collection and distribution of provisions (e.g. *Codex Theod.* 15.1.13; 7.1.5; 7.2; 7.13; 7.22.1–12; 7.1.9; 7.4; 7.15; 1.21.1; 2.1.2). Commanding officers of each

unit presumably had the same duties, but limited to the geographical area within the remit of their authority. These administrative duties were important, and further underscore the extent to which the frontier landscape needs to be understood as managed to serve the Roman army.

The Military Estate, Supply and Economy

The regional and local devolution of logistical aspects to a *dux* and subordinate commanders forces us to consider the importance of the military estate. As noted above, while the notion of a *territorium* attached to each fort can be put forward, identification and understanding of these landholdings 'on the ground' are more problematic. This is magnified when attempting to establish the totality of land given over to the Roman troops, either as legal landowners or as a party with privileged access to the imperial estate. Thus, at present there is no way of knowing how much land, or where, the *dux Britanniarum* had direct access to. It is necessary instead to analyse the data from forts and other military installations in the frontier zone to identify the goods and items consumed, and their possible origins. Such an exercise of course creates a patchwork approach of localised data-points, but when taken together provides a more generalised picture for the entire frontier region.

Ceramic supply and use offers a convenient starting-point. By the fourth century, the predominant sources of ceramics for the entire northern frontier of *Britannia* were the Yorkshire potteries; fine wares were produced at kilns outside of Crambeck in North Yorkshire, while the calcite-gritted coarse ware kilns have yet to be identified (Wilson 1989; Bidwell and Croom 2010). Other fabrics and ceramics are attested in the frontier, but the Crambeck and calcite-gritted products dominate the assemblages. Also striking is the dearth of vessels and fabric that originate outside of Britain by the fourth century; by then ceramic supplies were being almost completely met by Romano-British potteries. The Yorkshire fabrics and their latest forms are found distributed across a range of sites in the greater Yorkshire region, but outside of this core area of their production they occur predominantly on military sites, including the western coast of Cumbria. This distribution suggests that the Yorkshire ceramics were strongly tied to military supply in the fourth and early fifth centuries. However, there is no evidence to show that manufacture was directly tied to the army, and so the nature of this supply is uncertain; one claim is that private or commercial manufacturers supplied the wares (or perhaps their contents, in the case of the coarse wares) to the requisitions staff of the *dux Britanniarum* under a contract (Evans 1988).

Foodstuffs present a greater challenge, given the issues surrounding preservation. Animal bone regularly survives, and it is noticeable that skulls and foot bones are more often encountered in the late Roman faunal assemblages

at forts. This indicates animals arriving on the hoof and being butchered locally, rather than arriving as prepared and preserved cuts of meat. Evidence for this derives also from cattle teeth found at the forts of Carlisle and Birdoswald which share the same congenital trait, indicating that cattle at each fort were drawn from the same population, whether the same herd or else from animals with a shared condition found in a breed common to the western sector of Hadrian's Wall (Izard 1997, 366; Evans *et al.* 2009, 907). A widespread programme of stable-isotope analysis has yet to be applied to faunal assemblages from Roman forts, but a small project at the fort of South Shields has produced interesting results. Stable-isotope analysis of cattle teeth from six individuals taken from third-century deposits here demonstrated two or three potential geographical sources for the cattle (Waterworth 2014): two individuals appear to have been sourced locally, i.e. from lands stretching north and south from the lowest reaches of the River Tyne, while four individuals matched a geochemical signature present in south-west Scotland (Dumfries–Galloway) and northern Cumbria. While the sample size of the project is limited, the results are tantalising and reinforce an hypothesis proposed by Stallibrass (2008), in which lands in southern Scotland and northern England served as a predominantly pastoral zone during the Roman era that produced a surplus of meats, dairy, hides and related products, in contrast to the arable surplus of lowland parts of Britain (including Yorkshire). Perhaps it is in this capacity, as a processing centre or even a *fabrica*, that we should understand the evidence emerging from the fort of Banchester in County Durham, which has generated very large quantities of cattle bone (Ferris 2010; Petts 2015).

Cereals, even when there is evidence in the form of macrofossils, are not as easily sourced. Archaeological remains have been recovered from granaries at a number of fort sites, such as South Shields, Newcastle, Vindolanda and Birdoswald (van der Veen 1994; Huntley 1997, 2013; Huntley and Daniell 2002); as such, the samples come from a storage context rather than food preparation areas and contribute more to our understanding of the use of granaries than of diet, but these do permit some tentative patterns to be drawn (Huntley and Stallibrass 2010). Firstly, it is significant that it is the cereal grains that are preserved, which means that grinding of grain into flour must have been occurring at each fort rather than being milled centrally and distributed onward. Secondly, in addition to wheat, barley and oats are also present, and these latter grains are found in higher numbers in the fourth-century deposits. Thirdly, while it is not possible to directly identify the source of these grains, there is no reason to view them as imported: the upland ecology of much of the frontier zone favours local production of barley and oats, and the eastern lowlands of the region supported arable agriculture where such crops have been found and which were presumably grown at local rural settlements. This is not to argue that cereals were not imported to Hadrian's

Wall; indeed, the re-organisation of South Shields as a supply depot with at least 17 granaries from the later second to later third century provides clear testament to the bulk importation of foods and goods. However, we should not presume that all foodstuffs were imported from long distances.

The medieval period, with its greater surviving documentary evidence, proves surprisingly illuminating for the frontier zone. As a crude measure of the difference between upland and lowland agricultural value in the Wall corridor, the *Northumberland Lay Roll Subsidy of 1296* assessed the ward of West Tynedale at £553, covering the central sector of the Wall and its northern and southern hinterlands; the same source assessed the ward of East Tynedale at £1,430, which can be understood as the eastern sector of the Wall and its northern and southern hinterlands (Fraser 1968, xxi). The Wall corridor can also be contextualised relative to other parts of the frontier region. The tax assessment for the entire county of Northumberland was, in the thirteenth century, a fraction of that for the North Riding of Yorkshire (*ibid.*). While there were clearly different socio-political circumstances in the Middle Ages relative to the Roman period that will have influenced these tax assessments, agricultural technologies were not so different as to grossly distort the levels of productivity. At the most basic level, these figures indicate the wealth based on agricultural productivity of Yorkshire relative to Northumberland, and between the lowlands of the lower Tyne and the uplands of the upper Tyne.

Evidence for arable agriculture local to forts can be found at Housesteads, situated on the Whin Sill in the central sector of Hadrian's Wall. Following the abandonment of the extramural settlement or *vicus* outside the southern, eastern and western walls of the fort, the land was redeveloped to include agricultural terraces (Fig. 13.2). Excavation has revealed that the *vicus* was abandoned c. AD 270, and ceramics found in the terrace banking date confirm the terracing can be dated to the Roman period, with a *terminus post-quem* of c. 160 (Crow 2009, 255, 256; Welfare 2009). This provides some of the least ambiguous evidence for localised arable production related to a fort in the fourth century; field boundaries and agricultural plots simply do not survive at other locations. Agricultural implements, such as sickles, forks or hoes, will sometimes survive, though these are more commonly found in strata dated to the second and third centuries (e.g. Allason-Jones and Milet 1984).

Nor was local production limited to agricultural activities. There is abundant evidence for metalworking at military sites: for example, in the later fourth century, Room 12 of the *principia* at Housesteads furnished 800 iron arrowheads along with other iron objects and an anvil, suggestive of a smith's workshop (Crow 2004, 96), while a room in the back range of the *praetorium* at Banchester was converted into a smithy (Ferris 2010). A furnace thought to relate to metalworking inserted into the re-purposed *praetorium*



Figure 13.2 The fort of Housesteads, as seen from the south. Note the numerous agricultural terraces that were built up over the demolition and ruins of the second- and third-century extramural settlement (source: R. Collins)

bath-suite at South Shields yielded an archaeomagnetic date of post-AD 403 (Hodgson 1994, 44), and nearly 40 kg of smithing slag were recovered from a sequence of industrial hearths built in a converted area of the legionary *principia* at York, along with residues of bronze and lead-working (Carver 1995, 188). Clay moulds for the casting of late Roman spurs and a sandstone mould for ingots came from late fourth-century deposits at the fort of Bainbridge, which also yielded evidence for an iron-working forge (Bidwell 2012). A lead mould of an amphora-shaped strap-end, presumably used to create clay moulds for casting, has been found at Stanwix, and a miscast and unfinished copper-alloy strap-end from South Shields (Fig. 13.3) should signify on-site production (Collingwood 1931, no. 75; Allason-Jones and Miket 1984, no. 3.610). Such finds provide strong evidence that the *limitanei* were engaged in production and repair of material necessary for their profession and that they were not reliant on supply of goods from the large arms-factories located on the European mainland. Furthermore, local production of spurs and belt components indicates that, while production was local, the *limitanei* of northern *Britannia* were still participating in the display of military metalwork that was fashionable across the entire Empire.

Military Communities

The *limitanei* were situated at the geographical periphery of the late Roman Empire, and their role was focused on local and regional concerns pertaining to their specific

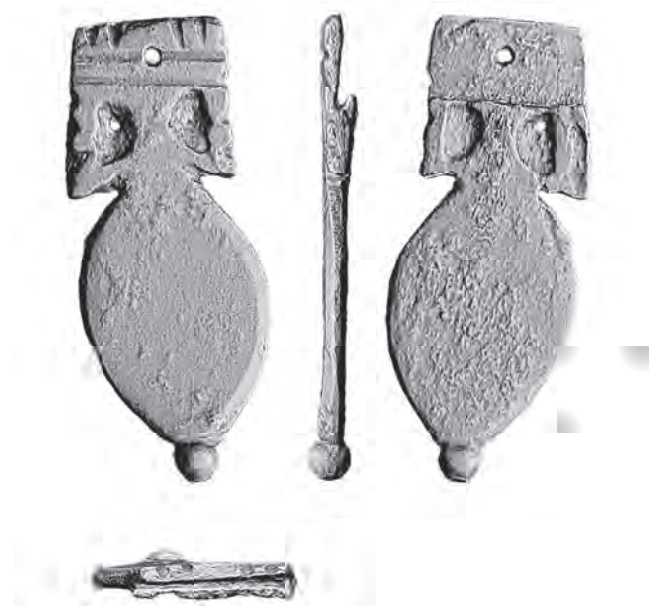


Figure 13.3 A 3D scan of a locally-made, miscast amphora-shaped strap-end from South Shields. Note the uncleaned metal between the 'handles' and the 'neck' of the amphora, and the missing back plate of the split end that would help fix the strap-end to a leather strap (source: NU Digital Heritage, Newcastle University)

frontier sector. By the later third century, extramural settlements had been abandoned along Hadrian's Wall, and the entire military community of soldiers, their dependents, and related civilians lived inside the walls of the forts. As

such, the forts of the northern British frontier in the fourth and fifth centuries were less populous and physically smaller settlements than in previous centuries, though more concentrated and (arguably) socially mixed than in previous centuries. The fort was no longer the exclusive preserve of the soldier – if it ever was – and this may be a partial explanation for the changes observed occurring in forts through the fourth century and after (discussed below). More difficult to ascertain, however, is the extent to which these military communities were self-sustaining in terms of population, or relied upon ‘top-ups’ of recruits from further afield.

Recruitment and provision of soldiers were as much an economic issue as social. Unfortunately, there is very little evidence that directly indicates the geographic origins of soldiers serving in northern *Britannia*. This is a result of the generally low numbers of mortuary remains dating to the fourth century and after from the frontier, and the cessation of inscribed funerary monuments from the later third century. Local recruitment is often assumed (e.g. Nicasie 1998, 20), in which the sons of serving soldiers enlisted in their father’s unit. But how local is ‘local’? The best evidence in understanding recruitment is found elsewhere in the Roman Empire: thus, legionary recruits in third-century Egypt and Spain were predominantly (75%+) from Egypt and Spain, respectively (Bohec 2000, 85–87), while static units of *limitanei* and *comitatenses* in the Eastern Empire in the sixth century were recruited locally to the region in which the unit was posted (Jones 1964, 669–670). This suggests that most recruits in northern *Britannia* were probably from within the province of *Britannia Secunda* or the diocese of *Britannia* itself. Officers may have been posted from further afield, though again very little evidence is available to verify this assumption. Stable isotope analysis of the mid- to late fourth-century inhumations from Scorton, outside the fort and town at Catterick, may support such a practice, where all the men buried with military metalwork appear to have reached adulthood on the European mainland (Eckardt *et al.* 2015). However, the burial ground at Norton is exceptional relative to the small sample of late fourth- and fifth-century burials from other military sites in the frontier, and it may be that many of the officers in northern Britain were drawn from local elites as they were in North Africa (Collins 2012, 109, 2017a).

The fact that Hadrian’s Wall was occupied until at least the early fifth century, along with most of the forts in the southern half of the frontier, signals that the imperial court had a continued interest in defending and retaining *Britannia*. As noted above, despite the reorganisation of the army under Diocletian, Constantine and subsequent emperors, the frontier army of northern *Britannia* changed very little in terms of basic structure. Indeed, it is significant that, in contrast to the other imperial frontiers, the military architecture of northern *Britannia* was never substantially upgraded: forts and other installations generally retained

and refurbished the defences and layouts of their second-century origins. The fort at Housesteads, for example, indicates a renewed interest in defence in the later fourth and early fifth century: new stone towers were built against the inside of the eastern and southern curtain walls, with frequent replacement and reinforcement of the fort wall and its earthen rampart backing, and the construction of timber-framed towers in later phases of activity; gates were blocked and narrowed to provide one portal of entry or blocked outright in the western gate; and there was a new excavation of a ditch paralleling the full length of the western rampart (Rushworth 2009, 316).

In this respect, the northern frontier would probably have appeared archaic or relict to any imperial generals and soldiers that were used to serving in the East, or the Danube or Rhine *limites*. Exceptions are the Yorkshire coastal fortlets (*née* signal stations) and a possible cordon of coastal defences along the coastline of north-western England and north Wales (Symonds 2015). That said, even in the archaic forts of northern *Britannia*, a number of changes can be seen in the buildings archaeology that indicate shifts in the military communities. Furthermore, the relict appearance of the forts means that we can archaeologically detect shifts in the record of identifiable building-types; the function of structures in the new or refurbished fortifications of the fourth century found on the European mainland, in the Near East, or North Africa are not usually so clear (Johnson 1983; Collins and Weber 2015).

The archaeology of the Wall and northern forts has been detailed and discussed at great length elsewhere (e.g. Collins 2012), but it is useful to briefly review these changes here. Given that the forts had been occupied for 100–200 years by the start of the fourth century, it is unsurprising to see various repairs and/or refurbishments made to buildings throughout the forts, and this could change the layout over time. Barracks, for example, were increasingly rebuilt from the later third century as either semi-standardised barracks containing fewer rooms, or else as the so-called chalet-style barracks that consisted of a line of detached or semi-detached structures each approximately the size of a single *contubernium*; barrack buildings become increasingly varied from the last quarter of the fourth century (Hodgson and Bidwell 2004).

However, alongside this (sometimes considerable) modification, many buildings might undergo changes in use, or a greater diversity of uses from the later fourth century than was archaeologically attested in previous centuries. Different building techniques were employed, with an increasing use of timber and/or earth, reducing the amount of construction in stone. Repairs, refurbishments and new structures were less bound by the strict internal spacing of the fort layout of the second and third centuries, for example in extending onto former road space, into the defensive rampart or even built along a new alignment. Such changes and modifications occurred even in key buildings,

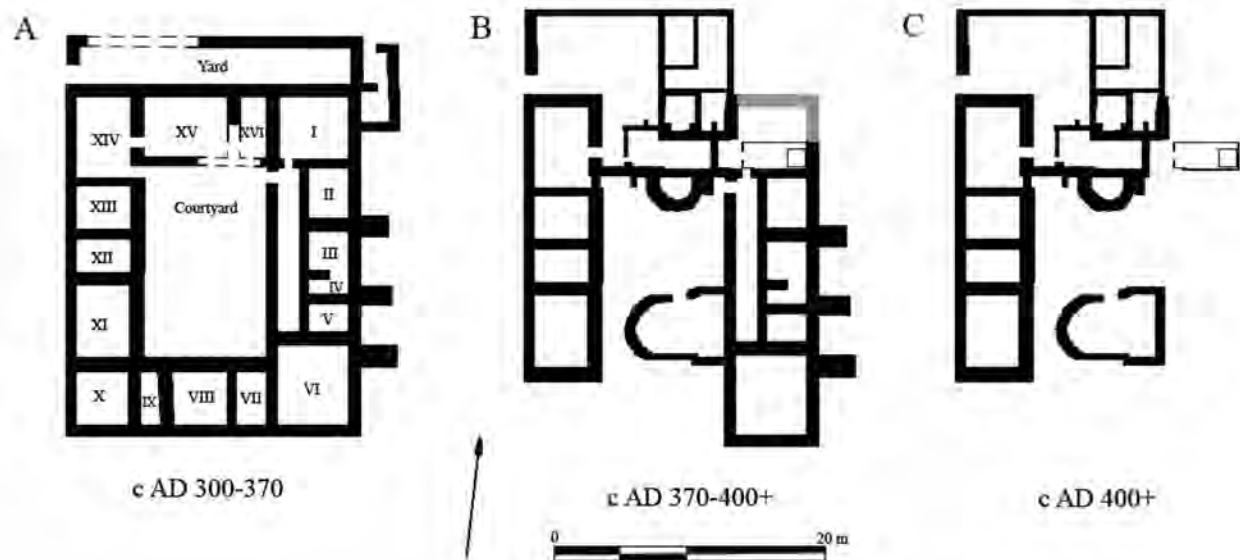


Figure 13.4 The phase sequence of changes to the Vindolanda praetorium. The standard courtyard house was modified c. AD 370, with the addition of a new bath-suite replacing the north wing, the demolition of the south wing, and the addition of an apsidal structure projecting from the east wing into the courtyard. In the final phase, the east wing appears to have been demolished (source: R. Collins, adapted from plans courtesy of Vindolanda Trust)

such as *principia*: the porticos or verandahs surrounding the forecourt of these often had new walls built or inserted to create a number of smaller rooms, and the office-spaces of the rear range might also reveal evidence for domestic occupation; the metalworking activity in the *principia* at Housesteads and York has already been highlighted. *Praetoria*, the courtyard houses of the commanding officers, were likewise prone to change (Collins 2017b). Bath-suites could be added or expanded, presumably replacing derelict or defunct external bath-houses, as at Binchester, Vindolanda and Chesters. Concurrently, the domestic space of the *praetorium* might be reduced in floor area, sometimes in conjunction with an apparent decline in the level of opulence or comfort, as observed at Vindolanda and South Shields (Fig. 13.4). The *praetorium* may in some instances have been given over to completely different activity: thus, at South Shields, the final phase of the courtyard complex dating to AD 400+ indicates not an elite residence, but what is interpreted as a likely furniture workshop (Greep 2014).

Even *horrea* or granaries, the storehouses quintessential to Roman military supply, were not immune to changes occurring across the forts (Collins 2015). The sequence at Birdoswald on Hadrian's Wall is intriguing (Wilmott 1997): while the site's southern granary was repurposed for social use, the northern granary was demolished and its subfloor used as a dumping ground. When the roof of the southern granary collapsed, a new timber-framed structure was built over the footprint of the demolished northern granary; this structure was in turn replaced by a timber post-built structure of a similar size, but offset slightly to the north and projecting onto the road. The excavator persuasively

argues that the granaries were redesigned as what are best described as mead or feasting halls that are more typical of early medieval societies.

It was not only the granaries at Birdoswald that were adapted, demolished and replaced. At many of the *horrea* along the Wall, it was fairly common to infill the subfloor of granaries in the third or fourth centuries, as recognised at South Shields, Newcastle and Vindolanda. But appropriation of granaries for some other use did not typically occur until c. 370 or after. Examples include the western granary at Newcastle which had a trench hearth inserted in the subfloor, indicating use for some industrial activity (Snape and Bidwell 2002, 62–66); the southern granary at Housesteads was subdivided, with its western end given over to domestic use, while the eastern end of the storehouse known as Building XV was converted to include a new bath-suite (Leach and Wilkes 1962; Rushworth 2009); and at Vindolanda, the western granary seems to have been reduced in size to include only the southern portion of the building with a new raised floor inserted, while the eastern granary was demolished and a new structure was built directly on the southern portion of the building (Birley 2013).

Further examples from forts across the frontier zone can be provided, and these all serve to highlight the drastic and fundamental changes that must have been occurring in the *limitanei* communities of the fourth century, with the most pronounced changes dated to the later fourth and fifth centuries. In this regard, northern *Britannia* presents a regionally coherent picture. In other frontiers, many of the broad trends observed in *Britannia* can also be found, though there are important differences in detail that support a

conclusion of distinctly regionalised frontiers (Collins 2012, 140–150). The question is, Why? While such changes can be seen occurring consistently in forts across the frontier zone, are these due to internal regional factors or to external drivers?

Discussion

The regionalisation of the later Roman Empire was exacerbated and encouraged by the evolution of the late Roman State (Errington 2006; Mitchell 2007, 180–184). Through the fourth century, the political structure of the empire was increasingly fragmented and compartmentalised into smaller self-sufficient administrative units with a concurrent political distancing between the local curial classes, provincial officials and the imperial court. Military commands ignored provincial boundaries for the expediency of defence, but supply (via taxation) was still bound by provincial and praefectural organisation. The cost of maintaining the army across the entire empire has been estimated as at least 75% of the total annual tax income (Erdkamp 2002, 7; Elton 1997, 118–125), and the economic organisation required to meet such costs must have been more visible in the frontier provinces. The relatively extensive and even distribution of forts and other installations across *Britannia Secunda* and the denser distribution along Hadrian's Wall meant that soldiers were a relatively common presence in the province. Lands adjacent to each fort, as well as land some distance away, were probably directly or indirectly producing resources going to the local fort, whether that consisted of crops, livestock, other foodstuffs, or craft and building materials. What is unknown is the extent to which essential supplies and provisions could be acquired locally, and how much had to be imported into the region by the staff of the *dux*.

Regardless of such unknowns, it is certain that the frontier garrison would have required considerable amounts of resource to be sustained and to enable it to remain effective as a professional soldiery. This in turn suggests that a considerable amount of the land will have been directly or indirectly managed to support the frontier garrison. Furthermore, the *limitanei* were not a transient population, but a broad network of military communities that had been embedded in the landscape, for centuries in the case of *Britannia Secunda*. This includes the soldiers themselves; as noted, it seems likely on the basis of evidence from elsewhere in the Roman Empire that the majority of the *limitanei* were drawn from within the frontier zone itself, or more widely from the provinces of *Britannia*. The army must therefore be understood as a major, perhaps even the primary factor in the shaping of frontier landscapes.

This conclusion has important implications for our understanding of the frontiers in the aftermath of Roman imperial withdrawal or severance, particularly when we lack evidence for withdrawal of the *limitanei* garrisons for duties

elsewhere in the late empire as attested in the later fifth century in Noricum by the *Vita Severini* (Bieler 1965). To a large extent, the fate of the *limitanei* depended largely on whether or not the frontier they served in can be understood as stable or unstable (Collins 2012, 150–153). In northern *Britannia*, there is no evidence to indicate that the *limitanei* were withdrawn and posted elsewhere, and instead there is mounting archaeological proof for continuous occupation of Roman forts into the fifth and sixth centuries. Based on his excavations at Birdoswald, Wilmott proposed that the *limitanei* along Hadrian's Wall continued to function, albeit at a smaller scale, as local warbands (1997, 224–231). Other sites have also provided evidence of occupation in the fifth and sixth centuries along Hadrian's Wall (e.g. South Shields, Housesteads, Vindolanda and Carlisle) and in the forts south of the Wall (e.g. Maryport, Binchester, Piercebridge, Malton, and the legionary fortress at York) (Collins 2012, 101–106). While a number of scenarios have been explored relative to the evidence, the general continuity of landscape clearance between the fourth to the late fifth/early sixth centuries suggested by pollen cores supports the broad notion of landscape (and general population) continuity (Collins 2012, 101–110, 128–137).

If the proposition is accepted that the *limitanei* were a key factor in the management and shaping of frontier landscapes, then the implication that they continued to shape such landscapes in the aftermath of Empire should not be surprising. The withdrawal, dispersal or destruction of the *limitanei* will have fostered an opportunity for the frontiers (as zones) to be reorganised to support the new authorities, whatever form they took, including, for example, a migrant barbarian group. But in those areas where the *limitanei* seemingly remained *in situ*, the presence of a managed landscape geared toward supporting a martial force may have been significant in shaping the emergence of the post-Roman powers, polities and even kingdoms (Collins, 2017c).

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People and Landscapes in Northern Italy: Interrogating the Burial Archaeology of the Early Middle Ages

Alexandra Chavarría Arnau

Introduction

Early medieval funerary archaeology in northern Italy has a long historiographical tradition and has indeed enjoyed an important revival in the last decade. Scholarly attention has focused above all on Lombard burials and their material culture, and recent publications include notable syntheses (such as Possenti 2014 and Giostra 2017), monographs on early medieval Lombard contexts,¹ papers on individual cemeteries² and bioarchaeological research including DNA and stable isotopes (Geary *et al.* 2015; Marinato 2016). Much less is generally published about ‘non-barbarian’ types of burial (not necessarily meaning unfurnished burials) and the majority of published cemeteries without ethnic features relate specifically to churches.³ In both cases it is important to underline that we are only broadly dealing with ‘special’ burial contexts, where recovered inhumations represent only a small subset of the total early medieval population; they cannot therefore be considered a valid basis for accurately reconstructing burial rituality or demographic patterns in early medieval Italy. This problem is due to the lack of a systematic record of burial evidence for this period, and the paucity of research publications describing ‘normal’ cemeteries (A valuable first statement and synthesis of the problem was Blake 1983). It is recognised, therefore, that there is a clear need for a more systematic and broad study of early medieval cemeteries in Italy, which includes different kinds of contexts and populations. This paper provides an overview of current questions and issues, and of new approaches to tackle these as we seek to interpret more coherently the evidence of the available (and future) burial archaeology.

Recording Early Medieval People in Northern Italy: The CAMIS Project

Cimiteri Altomedievali in Italia Settentrionale (CAMIS) is a project developed since 2010 with the specific aim of recording all the published data from late antique and early medieval cemeteries across northern Italy (so far more than 1300, but for the analysis in this paper data from 1151 cemeteries were used)⁴ (Fig. 14.1). By territory, the numbers of cemeteries in our database are: Belluno (96), Bergamo (134), Brescia (148), Como (10), Cremona (11), Gorizia (9), Lecco (6), Lodi (7), Mantua (36), Milan (50), Monza-Brianza (5), Padua (19), Pavia (33), Pordenone (33), Sondrio (1), Turin (78), Trento (114), Treviso (75), Trieste (3), Udine (83), Varese (54), Venice (19), Verona (105) and Vicenza (48) (see Fig. 14.2). All the cemeteries are being recorded in an integrated archaeological and anthropological database with information fields on: the geographical context in which each cemetery was located; the type of settlement to which the cemetery was linked; its chronological range; the number and organisation of the graves; grave types; surviving grave-goods; and information about the individuals buried in each grave. Unfortunately, the information can often be very imprecise due to the synthetic character or date of the publications on which our study is currently based, and a progressive completion of the database using more accurate excavation reports is therefore strongly recommended.

The project is ongoing (we are now recording the far-western provinces of northern Italy) and is currently commencing the analysis of the geographical distribution of particular features (non-‘barbarian’ grave-goods, sarcophagi),

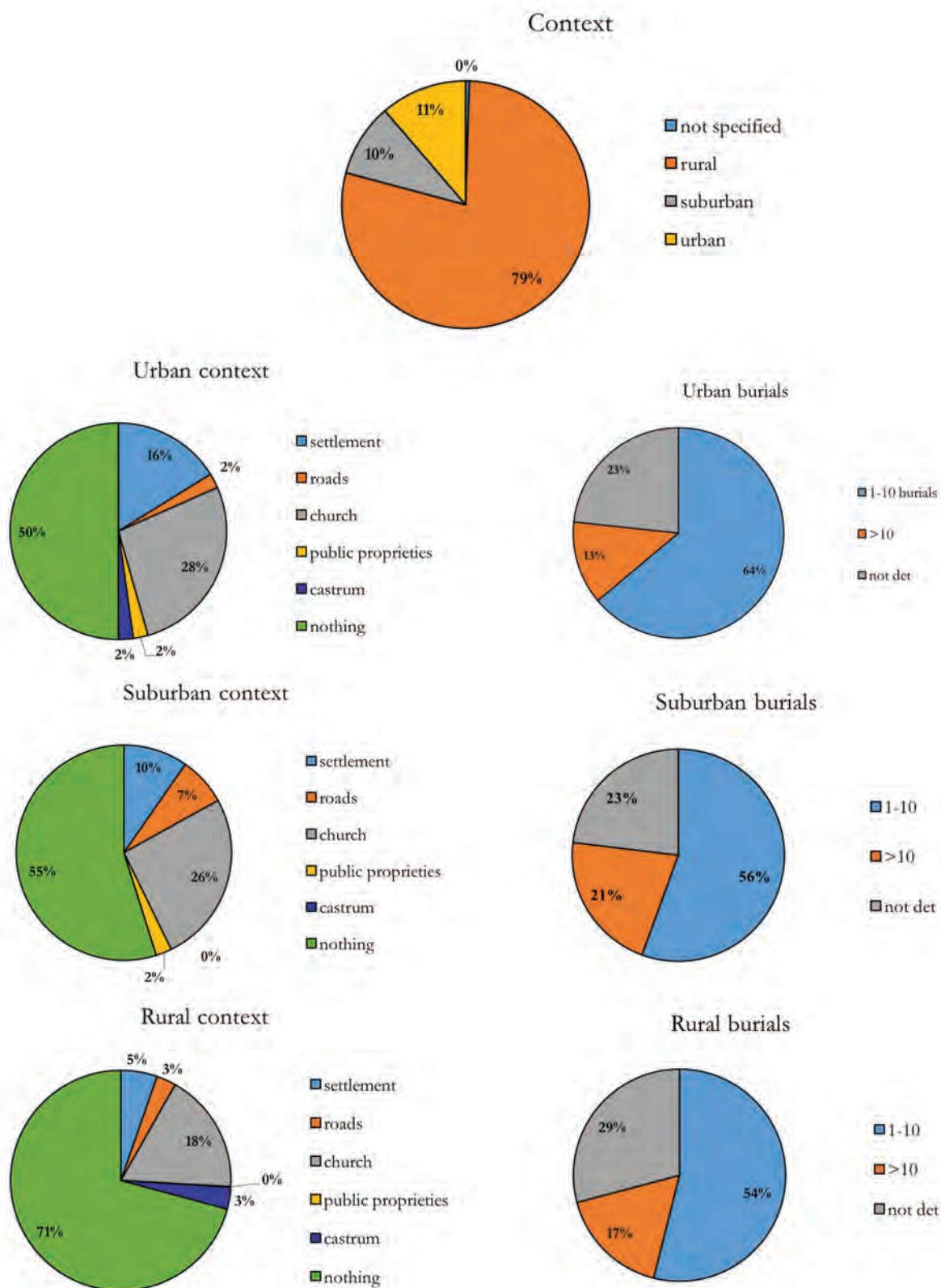


Figure 14.2 Number of cemeteries by provinces (based on published information – CAMIS)

individuals for each of the three generations identified in the cemetery.

The published data recorded in the CAMIS project form, therefore, in our view, an insufficient basis for a fully secure or even plausible demographic approach, although earlier efforts have tried to sketch early medieval demographic profiles for the sixth to eleventh centuries based on data from far fewer (14) Italian cemeteries (Barbiera and Dalla Zuana 1997). Currently, the only certain observations we can make are that there are a wide variety of characteristics, both in the composition and ordering of the cemeteries, and in the physical attributes of the recovered individuals.⁵

Diversity of Burial Practices as Markers of Political and Social Fragmentation?

Most current researchers agree that between the end of the Roman West and AD 1000, an individual burial might be made in diverse locations either in/around towns and in the countryside. This variety of burial locations potentially can shed light on wider political changes, the presence or impact of new powers, the process of Christianisation and the role of ecclesiastical authorities, the socio-economic context of the inhumed, as well as more generally on the changing use of urban space and on transformations of rural landscapes and ownership during the Early Middle Ages. In Italy's case we need to bear in mind the disruptions and upheavals from the later fifth century through to the eighth, from the conquest and occupation of the peninsula by the Ostrogoths (AD 489–c. 550), the damaging Byzantine-Gothic War (AD 535–554), the brief Byzantine control, then the Lombard invasion which split the peninsula after the 570s although with the majority of north Italy Lombard territory from the early seventh century, if with ongoing conflict with the Byzantines (and papal territories) into the mid- to late eighth century until Carolingian annexation. Archaeology has long been used to help chart the changing powers and possible population and ownership changes and/or continuities, and burials especially offer important insights to evolving societies and attitudes across this timeframe.

Among the higher levels of society, we can observe how social status might be displayed – as in Roman times – through the use of monumental graves or *mausolea* at prominent locations close to roads or at sites that could be easily seen by contemporaries. Christian buildings in cities and in the countryside became the favoured burial place for the upper classes but the large number of burials discovered close to suburban funerary churches implies that lesser economic and politically privileged urban groups were also buried in connection with these Christian buildings. Privilege was probably indicated by their position in relation to specific focal points of the church. However, not all Christians were buried at church cemeteries. Many

rural groups used open-air community burial grounds, or were interred close to habitations, and sometimes in areas that were unsuitable for other purposes, such as abandoned buildings. Some individuals might be buried at particular or strategic places whose meanings were probably clear to their contemporaries, but are more difficult for us to understand. Some isolated or 'deviant' burials (cf Reynolds 2009) might be linked to people removed from society (criminals, victims of plague, etc.), but such explanations cannot be confirmed without supporting palaeopathological evidence (see below). Below we outline the diverse settings and interpretations of burials across late antique and early medieval north Italy, in cities and in the countryside and in relation to individual churches.

Cities and Cemeteries

In recent decades, the study of late Roman and early medieval cities has witnessed an extraordinary development in Italy, as elsewhere. In Mediterranean areas it is clear that even if townscapes experienced deep transformations, especially in the loss, reuse and robbing of public spaces and buildings, and in increased craft and agricultural activities, these changes did not mean the end or abandonment of these towns which continued to act as central places for most territories, and as the sites where civilian and military authorities were based and where bishops had their sees and promoted the Christianisation of their territories (see Brogiolo 2011b). Recent research in Spain also shows that many of these changes are not exclusive to post-classical cities, since some sites were affected as early as the later second century (see Romero Vera 2016; Ruiz Bueno 2018 for an overview; Diarte-Blasco 2012 on public spectacle buildings). But a key difference between classical and post-classical 'functional' changes seems to be the use of intramural areas for funerary activity. Traditionally this 'entry' of burials within the towns has been interpreted as a consequence of urban Christianisation, with intramural burials being linked to new churches. However, close analysis shows that intramural churches rarely attracted burials before the eighth century (see Chavarría Arnau and Giacomello 2014; Chavarría Arnau 2009, 188–189) and that, in any case, intramural burials are very rare before the seventh century (Chavarría Arnau in press).

For the whole of the Early Middle Ages the most common settings for burials in cities were suburban areas. Roman suburban cemeteries, traditionally located next to the main approach roads to the cities, seem not to have been abandoned during Late Antiquity, although, already from the third century, sources mention Christian areas within the cemeteries of Rome and other western cities, or even of *cimiteria christianorum* organised by bishops. From Constantine (d. 337) onwards, Christian buildings start to be erected in these suburban cemeteries, often linked to a

martyr's tomb. Their function was probably originally that of covered cemeteries – *coemeteria subteglata* (Fiocchi Nicolai 2016, 630) – where ceremonies linked to funerary cults were arranged, but very soon other liturgical ceremonies were performed within them. The presence of martyrs and their relics, the conduct of liturgical ceremonies, in addition to the continuity of use of these areas from earlier centuries, attracted the favour of the highest urban elites, from bishops – who throughout the Early Middle Ages were mainly buried in such suburban 'basilicas' (Picard 1988) – to the civilian upper classes. Lesser status people were also probably buried there, but perhaps in specific areas. It is clear not only from the written sources but also from the archaeological evidence that church space was strictly controlled by the ecclesiastical authorities, who decided the identity and distribution of the graves, in accordance with Christian virtues and, undoubtedly, the value of economic contributions – something that the ecclesiastical authorities had, of course, tried to ban as early as the sixth century.

It would be interesting to identify fourth- or fifth-century suburban cemeteries not linked to monumental churches to see what kinds of burial types were used and what range of people were buried there. The situation at Cividale del Friuli in north-east Italy is particularly informative because several suburban cemeteries, datable to the sixth to seventh centuries, have been traced and sampled archaeologically (Borzacconi 2013; Ahumada Silva 2014) (Fig. 14.3). While these burial grounds have mainly been studied locally from the perspective of Lombard settlement, there is scope to explore for any particular differences between the population buried in pre-existing funerary areas (such as the cemetery of Cella–San Giovanni), and those buried in new cemeteries (e.g. San Mauro, Ferrovia, Santo Stefano); to ask whether there were late 'Roman' suburban cemeteries not related to churches here; and to compare all of this evidence to graves found inside the city (such as at Piazza Paolo Diacono and the Cathedral area), especially to understand their comparative chronology and to consider whether they reveal any social or economic differences.

While Roman and late antique legislation prohibited cemeteries being set up inside the urban *pomerium* (see Prieur 1986, 50–51), archaeology reveals that, especially after the sixth century, scattered burials were being made inside the original limits of the majority of the ancient cities (Lambert 1997, 2003; Chavarría Arnau in press). At least in northern Italy, these burial 'plots' were generally very small (between one and ten burials) and can often be related to abandoned private and public buildings. Scattered burials have been found in almost all Italian cities, in both Lombard and Byzantine areas. (For Byzantine Ravenna and Classe: Ferreri 2011 and 2014. For Rome: Meneghini and Santangeli Valenzani 1995; Meneghini, this volume). Burial inside the city is not to be viewed as a sign of marginalisation or low social status, but can sometimes denote privilege: thus, in

Verona a very high status female tomb dated to the earliest seventh century was discovered in the area of Palazzo Miniscalchi/Cortalta (*Curtis alta*) (La Rocca 1989, 42); at Verona, the burial place of the first Lombard king, Alboin, was under the staircase of his palace (Paul the Deacon, *HL*, II, 28); and at Cividale a sarcophagus containing rich mid-seventh-century grave-goods was recovered in 1874, in this instance possibly associated with some form of public or aristocratic building (Brogiolo 2001; Lusuardi Siena and Giostra 2012, 277–278). The characteristics and grave-goods of some of the graves recovered in Bergamo (via Osmano–vicolo Sant'Andrea) reveal an élite Lombard community and again the graves seem to be linked to some kind of public building and a monumental staircase (Fortunati *et al.* 2014, 141–144) (Fig. 14.4).

But elsewhere the characteristics of such graves could indicate that they indeed belonged to a low status, perhaps servile population, as was originally suggested by Brogiolo (1994, 560) for some graves close connected to sunken huts identified at Brescia (The number of scattered tombs known in late antique–early medieval Brescia totals 65: Brogiolo 2011, 49–50, with wider discussion on the uses of urban spaces for burial, 139–146). Similar data have been recently reviewed for other north Italian cities such as Pavia, Cividale, Piacenza and Alba by Giostra (2014b). Again, one must underline the extreme variability of the data and the possible related interpretations which indicates multiple ideological, social and economic traditions. The occurrence of formal burial activity inside the city before the seventh century is not, therefore, necessarily an indicator of Christianisation or evidence for the establishment of a church, but more probably relates to the changed ways of conceiving and using urban space in the post-Roman period.

It is noticeable that churches, and in particular cathedrals, in Italy did not attract formal burial grounds until a later date and never before the seventh century (Chavarría and Giacomello 2014). Some of the earliest burials found close to cathedrals seem rather to be linked to other contexts, either pre-dating church construction or of a period when the building was out of use, as in the examples of Alba (Micheletto 1999, 34; Lambert 2003, 230), Trento (Guaitoli 2013, 116–121), Brescia (Breda 2007, 240–242), Cividale (Borzacconi 2003) and Padua. At the latter, detailed stratigraphic excavation and a range of C14 dates clearly attested the complete destruction of at least part of the episcopal complex at the beginning of the seventh century followed by domestic activity comprising two huts with its burial plot (3 adults and 2 infants) (Brogiolo *et al.* 2017; Marinato 2017b for isotopic analysis) (Fig. 14.5). The area perhaps did not regain a religious function until the tenth or eleventh century, when a large building (possibly the baptistery) was built, with a large privileged funerary area attached to its walls (infants) and northern area (on the burials, see Canci *et al.* 2017).

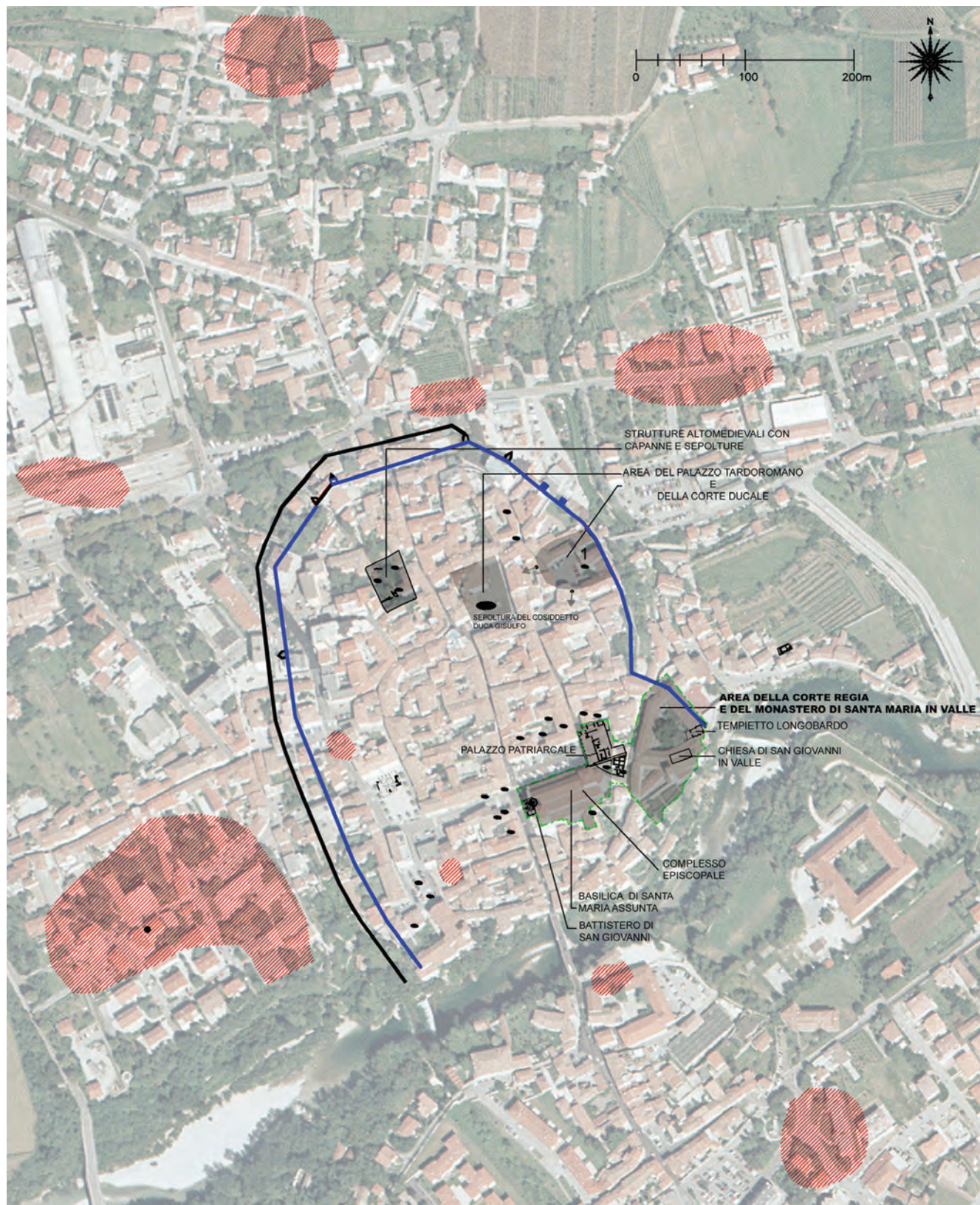


Figure 14.3 Early medieval cemeteries at Cividale del Friuli

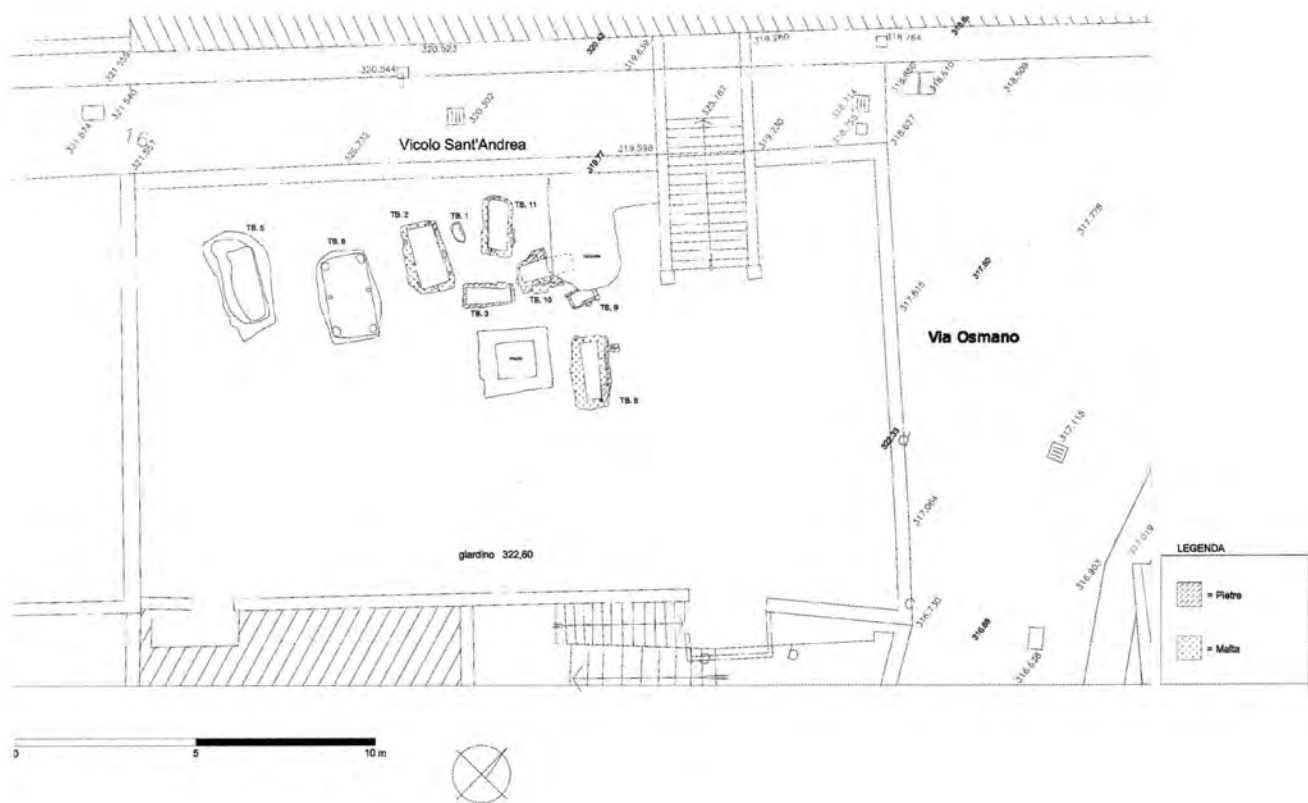


Figure 14.4 Bergano: urban burials at Via Osmano, Sant'Andrea (from Fortunati et al. 2014)

It is interesting that a number of lay people feature among the earliest, seventh-century graves that can reliably be linked to cathedrals, and for whom an identity can be proposed. At San Salvatore in Turin, inhumations, C14 dated to between AD 660 and 770, were identified by anthropological analyses to be members of the military aristocracies of the city (Pejrani Baricco 2003, 316). At Mantua, two monumental urban baptisteries existing during the seventh century (probably related to the different Arian/catholic confession of Lombard/local inhabitants) in Cortile del Seminario and via Rubens, were occupied by burials with weapons or clothing with gold brocade sometimes outside the building but also in the internal deambulatory (Menotti and Manicardi 2004; Manicardi 2015, 56–61 for via Rubens, 38–39 excavated by G. P. Brogiolo in 1987). An inscription from the baptistery of Santo Stefano in Milan refers to a certain *vir honestus* called Lucifer, but in this case we lack a precise date (Lusuardi Siena and Sannazaro 2001, 657). The earliest textual references to ecclesiastical burials in cathedrals (presbyters and bishops) seem to come slightly later, from the eighth to ninth centuries (Picard 1988).

By the seventh century, members of the Lombard aristocracy in north Italy were still being buried in the pre-existing suburban churches (such as the old suburban church of the martyrs Gervasius and Protasius in Pavia, the

church of Saint Ambrose in Milan, and at Saint Eusebius in Vercelli) (Lusuardi *et al.* 2000, 273–283), but by then they were building new churches outside as well as inside the cities that they inhabited or served in.

Cemeteries in the Countryside

From the fifth century onwards, the transformation of the rural economy and of the economic strategies of landowners are reflected in a dramatic change in settlement patterns characterised by the abandonment or transformation of classical Roman settlements (Brogiolo and Chavarría 2015). Although recent research has focused on the problem of the end of the late Roman/antique *villae* (see bibliography in Castrorao Barba 2014), no definitive answers have emerged to explain these changes: interpretations range from the slow decay in the lifestyle of the late Roman elites (who, occasionally, may have continued to occupy these buildings) in light of wider state and economic decay, to an abandonment by previous owners and the reoccupation by other kinds of settlers (e.g. dependent or free farmers, new immigrant populations). Written sources seem to support both possibilities, such as citing the existence of centres of large properties, frequently at the top of the fiscal property hierarchy (royal and ducal *curtes*), in civilian or ecclesiastical hands, and sometimes even belonging to large

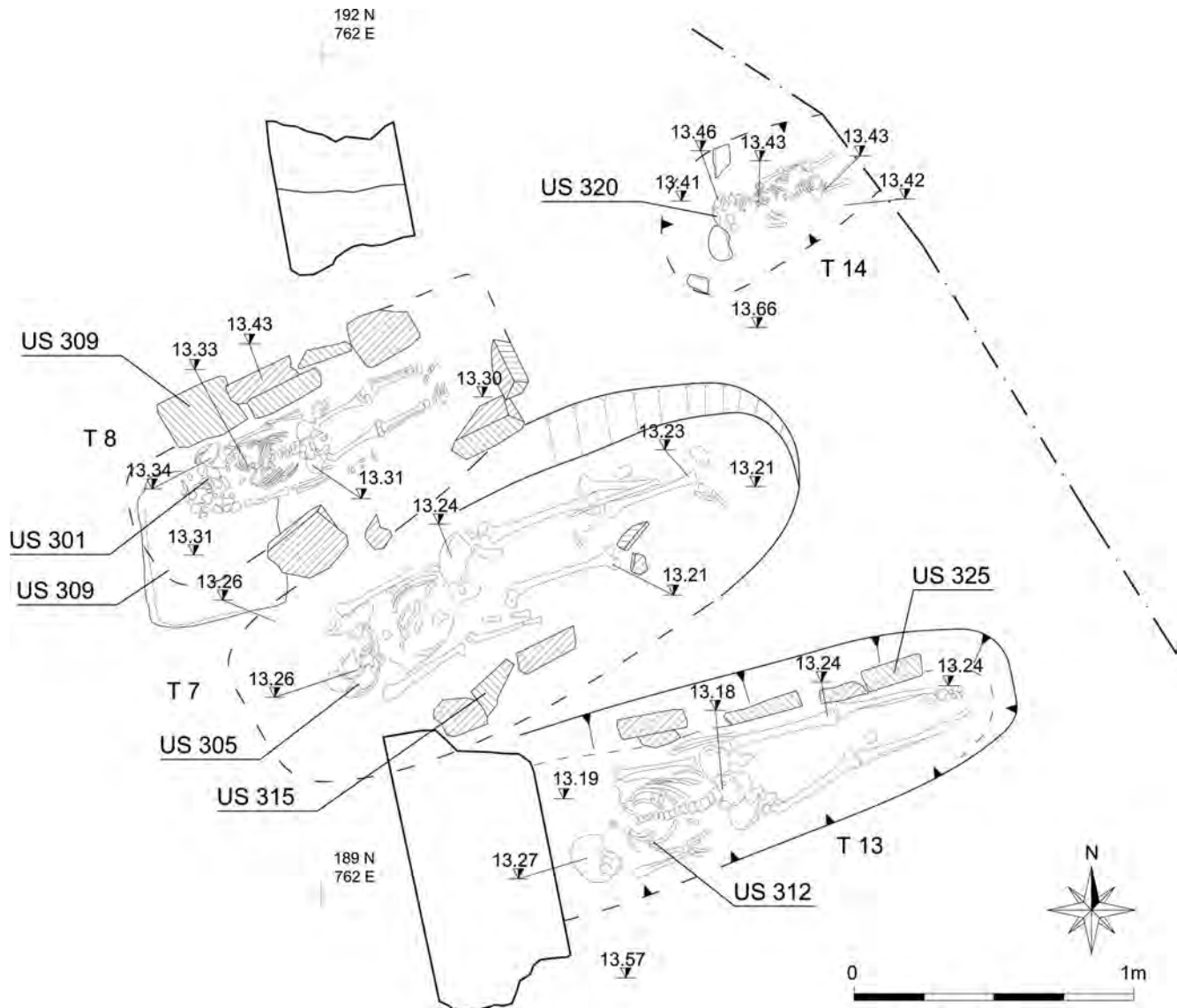


Figure 14.5 Early medieval burials from the Duomo excavation (tombs 7, 8, 13, 14) (from Canci, Marinato and Zago 2017, 133)

monasteries (The archaeological identification of these *curtes* is now a notable subject of research).

At the same time, the late Roman period sees the emergence of fortified settlements (*castra*) that were part of a broader military system composed of castles, towers and barrier systems (Brogiolo 2014, 143–156; Brogiolo, this volume); and, from the fifth century, churches and, slightly later on, monasteries become new, distinctive features of the landscape. All these started to form foci for burial activity.

In Roman times, rural cemeteries frequently lay not far from villa buildings, often protected by a walled enclosure and generally near a road.⁶ Grave structures show a clear hierarchy of burials, with some combining elaborate funerary monuments with multiple grave-goods, and others as much simpler graves. Such contrasting deposits suggest that villa owners and their dependent workers were probably buried

together in the same cemetery. In some cases, *mausolea* were located closer to the villa, marking out the social, economic and cultural importance of the proprietors or one particular member of the family. These burial places might remain in use until the abandonment of the main buildings, which seems to have occurred during the fifth century. From that moment on, burial practices diversified.

In some cases, small groups of burials came to be inserted in abandoned areas within the villas (sometimes with other spaces of the complex still active); these groups might be identified as small family groupings, as at Montegrotto, Terme Neroniane (Pd) a villa abandoned in the fourth or fifth century; similar are Desenzano (Bs), Sirmione (Bs), Manerbio (Bs) and Varone at Riva del Garda (Tn). The difficulty in all these cases is to understand when exactly the villas were abandoned, whether this event was rapid,

slow or partial, and if there was a gap in time between the site's abandonment and the establishment of the graves (these not always well dated) – factors which can much alter the interpretation of the burials. The villa of Castelletto di Brenzone (Vr) had been robbed for its marble decorations and then colonised with a domestic structure before burials were set into some of the rooms (Bruno and Tremolada 2011, 99–102. See Nicosia *et al.* 2013 for soil micromorphology and physicochemical analyses of dark earths here).

At Arcole (Vr), the reuse of part of an Augustan villa as a small cemetery was preceded by the building's destruction by fire (of the late fourth century?), the silting up of the structures by multiple episodes of flooding, possibly contemporaneous with some sort of rural settlement dated between the seventh and tenth century, built in perishable materials (Bruno 2011). Anthropological analysis suggests a family group (11 graves, with six identified as those of three men, one woman and two infants), who practised hard physical activity (probably agriculture) with a very low hygiene and personal care (Marinato 2016). We might expect comparable data for many other post-villa funerary clusters. But it is extremely difficult to identify who these people were and what relationship they had with the old villa complex or estate. In the cited examples they look very much like free or unfree farmers (*coloni* or serfs) working a property belonging to somebody else (perhaps even the Church) likely living in the city.

In other cases (e.g. Sovizzo (Vicenza), Spilamberto (Mo), Trezzo sull'Adda (Mi), Mombello Monferrato (Al), Calvisano (Bs)), larger cemeteries might occupy areas some distance from the main villa buildings. The existence of clear elements that link this burials to non-Roman populations could be an indicator of property changes (as argued for Collegno and Mombello, both in Piedmont) linked to the settlement of barbarian groups in (probably) public lands as recently proposed by Pierfrancesco Porena (2011) regarding the settlement of the Ostrogoths in the 480s and 490s. At Trezzo, for example, written sources attest a number of late Roman fiscal properties which passed at some point to the patrimony of the royal crown and of Lombard elites such as the *vir magnificus* Rottopert. This has now been confirmed by the evidence of a large cemetery examined through anthropological analysis, DNA, and the typology and technology of grave-goods (Lusuardi Siena and Giostra 2012).

Many so-called 'open-air cemeteries' (Reihengräberfelder), such as recognised at Collegno, Albano Stura, Leno and Montichiari, are also related to settlements built in perishable materials (and thus less likely to be observed casually through agricultural work), and seem to be connected to the land routes and river network, sometimes at a local strategic control point, such as a bridge. In northern Italy, their distribution is seen to reflect the advance of Lombards from east to west and the occupation of the fertile plains of

the *pianura padana*, especially close to the main political and strategic centres such as Verona, Brescia, Bergamo and Turin.

In the case of fortified settlements (*castra/castella*), burials are frequently located at the foot of a hill and close to the roadways controlled by the fort. Unsurprisingly, these cemeteries frequently include graves of armed males (e.g. Civezzano: Terzer 2001). At Monselice, burials with military grave-goods instead occurred inside the area of the *castrum*, and it is still uncertain whether these burials were linked to a fortified tower or whether this tower had been already transformed into a church (Brogiolo 2017b, 26–28) (Fig. 14.6). Churches in *castra*, at least during the first centuries of their use, did not attract large numbers of burials. The character of funerary areas at *castra* can be related to the functions of these settlements: in their early phases, the site roles are focussed primarily on defence and may have had small garrisons, perhaps not always in residence; only when *castra* become the seats of administrative districts do we see more regular burial, reflecting stable communities; however, as yet, none of the cemeteries linked to this kind of settlement has been extensively excavated. Observing gender ratios in these cemetery sequences might help in clarifying early to later site roles. This seems to be the case at the *castrum* of Monselice where all the burials have been identified as male or infants (Marinato 2017a).

More often than might be expected, our census records a very large number of isolated or very small groups of burials dispersed in the countryside with no apparent relationship to any settlement. While these are traditionally interpreted as the tombs of marginalised communities, their frequency recommends a rather different explanation, as proposed in other parts of Europe, notably Anglo-Saxon England (Petts 1992; Reynolds 2002) or late Roman Gaul (Gleize 2017). Such burials could, for example, be linked to particular features of the landscape, such as property boundaries, secondary paths or points of assembly – whether for trade or even for justice. But this cannot be the only interpretation. Gleize has hypothesised that they could also be identified as dependent farmers of free or unfree status (2017, 206, with other interpretations). In many cases they probably demonstrate the persistence of dispersed settlements throughout the period and the possibility that farmers and their families were buried on their own land, near their residences.⁷ Further research is also needed on this subject (cf Pecquer 2003 for France).

Burials in Rural Churches

In the rural context, churches (ones generally connected with settlements, including *castra*) tended to attract privileged burials during the Early Middle Ages. In contrast to urban sites, where the functions of intramural cathedrals and suburban basilicas (funerary and martyrial) are relatively well established,⁸ in the countryside the meaning and use of



Figure 14.6 Monselice: Lombard burials excavated by the tower (from Brogiolo 2017a)

ecclesiastical buildings are more problematic matters. While it is already very difficult to understand the complex variety of churches described in the written sources (public, private, privately founded but with public functions, for pastoral care, funerary, monastic dependencies, and churches linked to royal and ducal *curtes*) (see Chavarria Arnau 2016 for the Lake Garda region), there are even more difficulties in the archaeological record.

Many problems persist concerning the study of burials inside churches due to the lack of detailed plans and accurate dates, and the often partial nature of the excavations. The impression, however, is that the inner spaces of churches were rarely used as mass burial places, with, normally, only a small number of graves (between 1 and 5) located in the aisles, but with a more conspicuous number tending to concentrate in annexes such as the vestibule or atrium; the majority of the burials of course lay outside the church. Exceptional, therefore, are cases where the church interior saw intensive burial use. At San Lorenzo di Gozzano (Fig. 14.7), the presumed tomb of its founder San Giuliano formed a magnet for privileged burial (Pantò and Pejrani Baricco 2001), especially after the saint's *Vita* was first composed and disseminated (Beghelli 2011). Anthropological analysis identified a predominance of adult males among these burials, and chiefly older persons. One grave (t2) located close to the altar contained a glass vessel which might signify member of the ecclesiastical hierarchy buried with an oil balsamary.⁹ Potentially here the presence of relics attracted priestly burials. Interestingly, the archaeologists identified one of the church tombs as that of a revered figure, perhaps in fact the founder saint, San Giuliano, because his head was placed at the eastern end of the grave. Texts state that the clergy in death should occupy

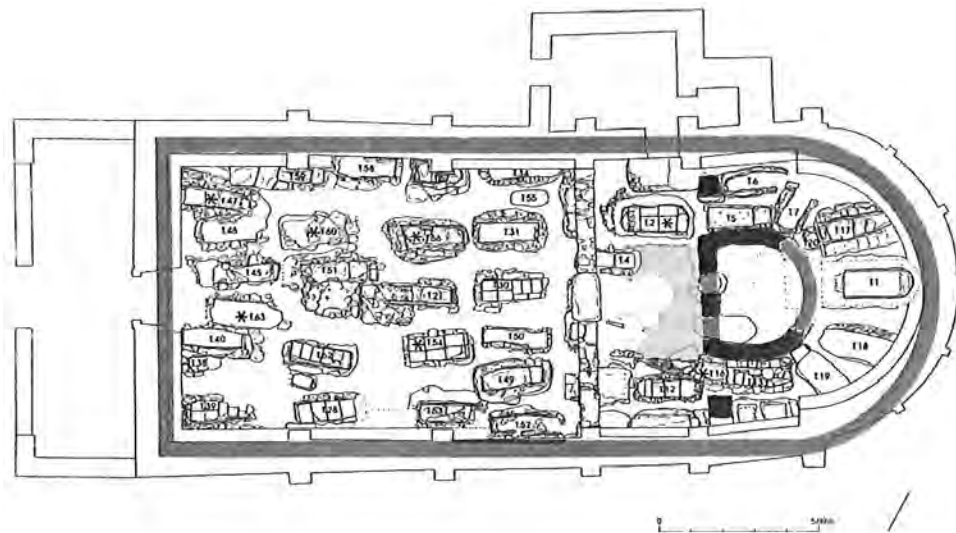


Figure 14.7 Church of San Lorenzo di Gozzano (Novara) (from Pantò and Pejrani Baricco 2001)

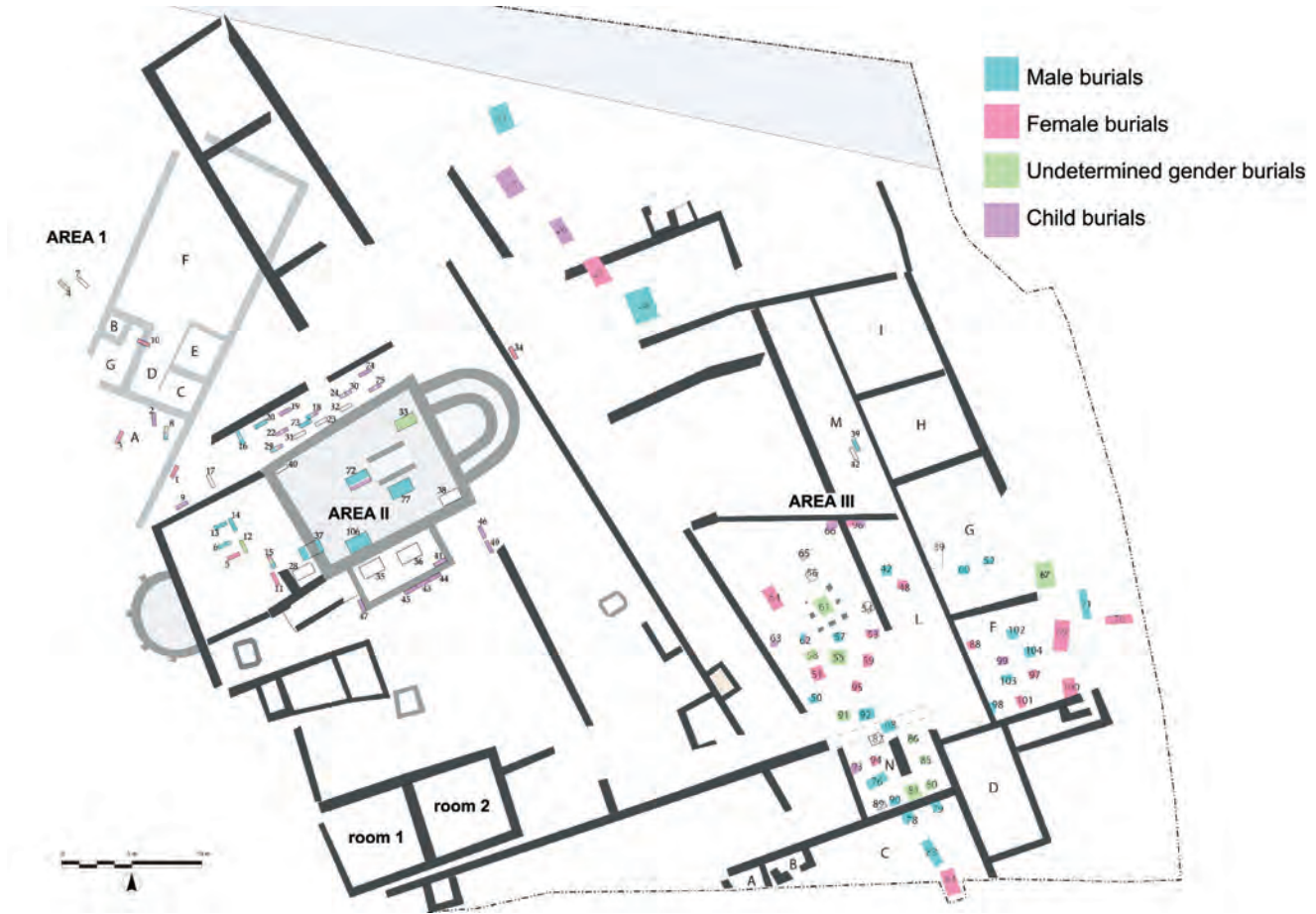


Figure 14.8 Church and cemetery at San Cassiano (Riva del Garda) (from Amoretti 2011)

the same position in the church as during life, i.e. facing the people whom they had taught and blessed in Christ's name.¹⁰

Anthropological data can offer valuable insights into the dynamics of burials linked to settlements and church use. Generally, there seems to be a gender distinction, with men more often buried in privileged locations, mainly inside a church, whereas women are frequently buried outside. Thus, at San Cassiano near Riva del Garda (Trento) (Fig. 14.8), the eight monumental graves placed in the church (of the end of the fifth or the first half of the sixth century) were all male (seven adults in their 40s and an infant: Amoretti 2011); such data contradict the view of the excavators that the church was used for family burial.¹¹ Women were instead buried in the external cemetery, located first in the northern area, but later occupying space in front of the church. It is even less likely that the inhumed inside were the priests of the church, since these adults all showed signs of much horse-riding. In fact, the dimensions of the church and the complexity of its liturgical arrangements (which include a *synthronon* or priest's seat and a monumental *loculus* for relics) point instead to some kind of public enterprise and the interred men probably belonged to the highest, probably military, local elites of this community.

A family-private use has been proposed instead at the church of San Zeno di Campione (Co) (Fig. 14.9) with at least 15 burials belonging to three generations of the same family, starting with that of the founder, a Lombard slave-merchant called Gunduald at the end of the seventh century, up to the last – a certain Totone – who gave the building to the church of Saint Ambrose in Milan in c. 807 (In this instance, the archaeological and anthropological data neatly mesh with a rich written documentation: Brogiolo 2005). The limited number of burials and the dimensions of the building could similarly indicate a private character for the oratory of San Quirico in Bolgare (Bg): measuring 4.5×12 m, and containing seven graves, including one infant aged about 1 year, a 12-year-old child, and a couple of men and women aged about 30 to 40 years (Mazzucchi *et al.* 2009).

The process by which cemeteries moved progressively closer to churches during the last centuries of the Early Middle Ages has not been studied in Italy, unlike in Gaul or Britain (Galinié and Zadora-Rio 1996; Zadora-Rio 2003; Buckberry and Cherryson 2010). Nor do we know when the creation of the parish cemetery as a consecrated burial ground strictly controlled by clerics took place; most probably this began in the ninth century, but it was, as in other areas, a

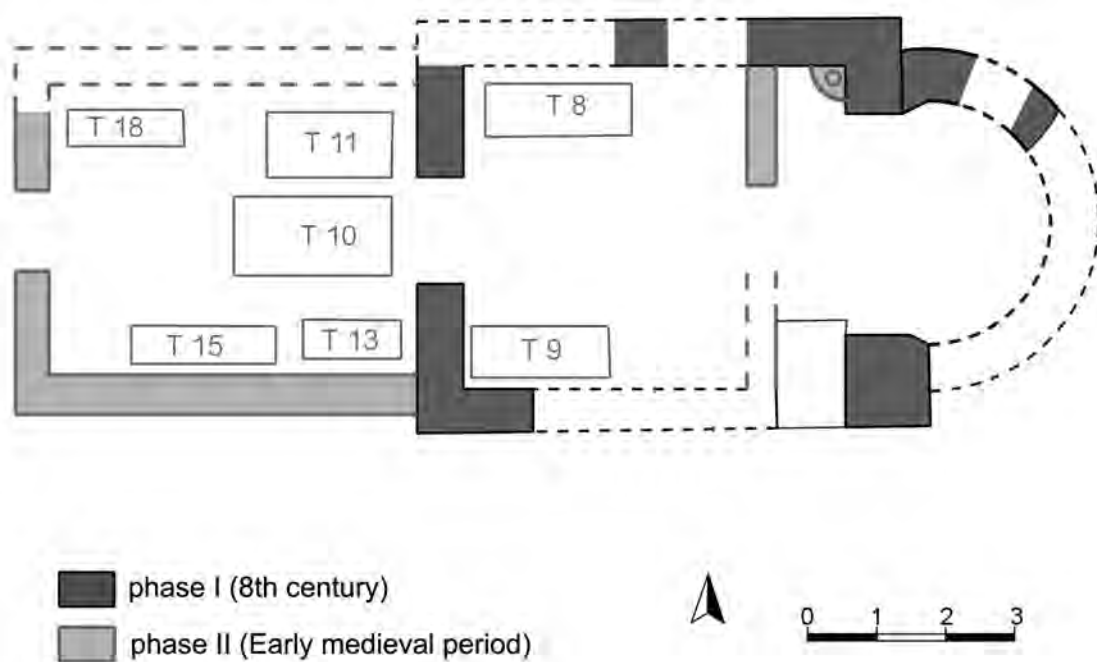


Figure 14.9 Private church with family cemetery at San Zeno di Campione (Como) (from Brogiolo 2005)

slow process, as the continued presence of dispersed groups of burials dating to the ninth and tenth centuries show.

Conclusion

The great variety of burial modes (in terms of location, funerary architecture, rites) that has been outlined above certainly mirror different social entities resulting from the many periods of fragmentation and instability, in contrast to stable societies (such as the Roman, Islamic or late medieval epochs) which had funerary norms and traditions with largely unified burial rites (see Fierro 2000; Halevi 2007). The diversity evident in the early medieval period also reflects how funerary rites depended much on familiar groups and local initiatives. The preference for one type of tomb or another, the presence and range of grave-goods, the use of monuments over the graves and actual location all served to mark the varying social and economic status of the deceased, but this varied locally depending on multiple factors. The growing influence of Christianity and the presence of churches and churchyards where people could be buried will have had a notable impact on the funerary customs of the diverse early medieval populations. Yet researchers also agree that the influence of the Church upon burial practices was less than was once thought, arguing that its authorities, notably bishops, were little concerned with the mode and place where ordinary people were interred; their main concern was to ensure that only ecclesiastics and civil elites (in other words, patrons) were buried in appropriate ecclesiastical buildings. However, this assertion rather contradicts the fact that, already from

the third century, bishops were making provisions for the acquisition of special funerary areas for the poor. Did the attitude of the Church authorities perhaps change over the course of the Early Middle Ages as the character of the people who made up those authorities changed? Only from the late seventh century onwards, with the definitive end of Arianism and the triumph of Catholicism among the Lombards in north Italy, and later from 774 with the alliance between Carolingian kings and the Church, was a certain political and spiritual stability achieved, leading to greater unity in burial practices, and the creation of blessed cemetery areas near churches which slowly but definitively became the primary, designated places of burial in both town and country. Graves in churchyards were to become more anonymous, as shown by the frequent cuts between graves and the multiplication of ossuaries. However, elites did not lose their visibility in death since they continued to express their distinctiveness by the position of their tombs inside the church, by funerary inscriptions (De Rubeis 2000 and 2005) and by the ceremonies of remembrance.

Notes

- 1 A sample of key sites and publications could be Collegno: Pejrani 2007; Mombello: Micheletto 2007; Montichiari: Breda 2007; Spilamberto: Breda 2010; Trezzo sull'Adda: Lusuardi and Giostra 2012.
- 2 For example, Momo and Albano Stura discussed in Micheletto *et al.* 2014; Fara Olivana and Caravaggio in Fortunati *et al.* 2014; Povegliano in Giostra 2014a; Sacca di Goito and Mantova in Menotti *et al.* 2014; and Cassano d'Adda in De Marchi and Simone 2014.

- 3 Examples include the burials at Trino: Negro Ponzi 1999; Saint Quirico in Bolgare (Bg): De Marchi and Fortunati 2006; San Pietro di Limone: Chavarria Arnau 2008; churches in the Lake Garda area: Brogiolo 2011; and San Martino di Lomaso: Cavada *et al.* 2014.
- 4 Funded by the University of Padua between 2010 and 2013 but ongoing thanks, mainly, to the enthusiasm of many students. The project also included the participation of various staff of north Italian Soprintendenze, such as Maria Fortunati, Andrea Breda and Brunella Bruno who permitted study of some funerary contexts, and specialists from other institutions such as Marina De Marchi, Caterina Giostra and Elisa Possenti. Their help was greatly appreciated throughout.
- 5 Note that recent research on late Roman and early medieval demography (Lo Cascio and Maiuro 2017) tends to be critical about the possibility of achieving plausible numbers based on 'classical' calculations (e.g. the capacity of public entertainment buildings, water circulation in cities) and proposes more complex analysis (for the countryside, for example, based on regressive analysis of agrarian landscape productivity – see Brogiolo 2017a).
- 6 To my knowledge, there is still no general study of rural Roman cemeteries in Italy. Some of the best studied cases are the cemetery of 'El Lucone' at Saló (Brescia): Massa 1996; Massa and Brambilla 1997 and San Cassiano (Riva del Garda): Bassi 2013.
- 7 In general we still do not know how many different burial locations might have been used by a single settlement (or a cluster of farms and villages) at the same time or successively, making it difficult to draw conclusions on the form of settlement on the basis of discoveries of scattered cemeteries (Blake 1983, 189–191).
- 8 The dichotomy between *ecclesia-basilica* and their different functions is now well established thanks to the detailed studies of Christian topography initiated in France by the group *Topographie Chretienne des cités de la Gaule* and adopted later with similar analyses in both Italy and Spain. Some reflections on the different uses of both kinds of churches and Chavarria Arnau 2009.
- 9 Another unspecified glass object was found in a tomb located close to the *synthronon* or seat for the priests at the church of San Pietro in Mavinas: perhaps another balsamary or a glass paten or another kind of liturgical vessel of an ecclesiastical member of the community. On the sacred vessels and objects deposited in the burials of members of the ecclesiastical authority, see Ferotin, *Liber ordinum*, XLIII and XLV, col. 139–146.
- 10 Hildebert of Tours, *Sermones*, ed. by Migne, col. 896, cited by Thurston 1908.
- 11 Amoretti 2011 proposes family links between the males because of some morphological and epigenetic characteristics; but without bio-molecular analyses such family links cannot be certain.

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Rural and Urban Contexts in North-Eastern Spain: Examining and Interpreting Transformations across the Fifth–Seventh Centuries AD

Pilar Diarte-Blasco

Introduction

This paper explores north-eastern Spain as a case study of late antique (late Roman to Visigothic) change, drawing on a growing archaeological record to question and interrogate the sequences of settlement change especially. The Iberian Peninsula is a substantial territory of c. 585,000 km², with many differences between areas: a complex orography, with several mountain ranges and important river valleys – notably the Duero, Ebro and Guadalquivir basins – create differentiated spaces; accordingly, we should not expect wholly comparable types of landscape evolution to be traced, or similar transformations of long or short-term dynamics, over several scales of time and space.

Currently, these differences appear greater than they probably really were, because there is such a clear disparity in research on this q from area to area. In fact, most prominent – in quantity and also in quality – are those studies centred on the northern and middle Iberian territories, zones in which the Universities of the Basque Country and of Salamanca have led many projects focused on settlement patterns and landscape transformations across this transitional period (Quirós Castillo 2009; Ariño Gil *et al.* 2012; Ariño Gil 2006, 2013). These projects have generated some sometimes sizeable and very detailed datasets about farms, villages and hamlets (cf Vigil-Escalera 2000; Azkarate and Quirós Castillo 2001) as well as about the phenomenon of hilltop occupation (Quirós Castillo 2011; Vigil Escalera and Tejerizo García 2014). Such analyses assessing the characteristics of these rural and quasi-urban sites together with the older Roman urban centres and the *civitates* – many of which diminished spatially and demographically – are substantially changing our understanding of the Hispanic late antique landscape. Furthermore, in Andalusia, the southern region of Spain,

recent studies have enhanced the dataset (Martín Civantos *et al.* 2010; García Vargas and Vázquez Paz 2012; Román Punzón and Martín Civantos 2014); but while it is perhaps too early to draw a fully coherent picture of this period in this region, we know that the occupation of hilltop sites was especially dense in eastern Andalusia from the fifth century, whereas in the west, a higher concentration of urban centres endured into the Early Middle Ages (Román Punzón and Martín Civantos 2014, 76).

But, unfortunately, not all peninsular areas have seen the same level of archaeological investigation and some zones remain archaeologically undeveloped (see the recent overview in Diarte-Blasco 2016). One such area is the fluvial basin of the River Ebro – above all the middle valley area – in north-eastern Spain, which corresponds to the ancient Roman province of *Tarraconensis*. Accordingly, this chapter remedies this gap by presenting a detailed overview of the most significant archaeological data for this area, covering both rural and urban contexts, between the late Roman Empire and the Middle Ages.¹ Key aspects I will explore include: the abandonment of some urban centres and the continuity of others; the decay and dismembering of the late Roman countryside; the emergence of new types of habitat and the characteristics of the modified and changing settlement pattern in this shifting landscape.

The Ebro Basin and its Urban Context

The archaeological data for the fluvial basin of the River Ebro – an area of c. 40,000 km² and extending for a length of 840 km – related especially to its evolution in post-classical times are currently fragmentary. This situation is particularly poor for the central area of the valley. In fact, apart from the final stretch of the river in the Catalan region

and the area of its source in the north, where recent work has generated useful data for both settlement and landscape change, the available evidence offers an uncertain and disjointed panorama, albeit with some interesting indicators; furthermore, the evidence to hand needs re-examination in light of wider European debates on this period (e.g. Hamerow 2002; Francovich and Hodges 2003; Wickham 2005; Brogiolo and Chavarría Arnau 2005) and also, and above all, calibration via stricter application of Landscape Archaeology approaches.

The Ebro Valley was part of Roman *Tarraconensis*, which was one of the earliest and most Romanised areas of the Peninsula. My analysis concentrates on the middle and eastern part of the valley, mainly comprising the old *conventus Tarraconensis* and *Caesaraugustanus*, which mostly remained in imperial hands until AD 470–475. It is important to bear in mind that the rest of the Peninsula, after 409, was occupied by Suevi, Vandals and Alans. In this first allocation, the Alans were installed in the *Lusitania* and *Carthaginensis* provinces, the Siling Vandals in *Baetica*, and the Hasdingi Vandals and the Suevi in Gallaecia (Arce 2005, 31–40). However, this initial division was short-lived and in 417 Gothic *foederati* were sent by the Western Empire to recover the imperial lands, destroying the majority of these groups, with the exception of the *gentes* concentrated in the north-west who created the Suevic Kingdom (411–585) (Díaz Martínez 2011). By the end of the sixth century, however, the hegemony of the Visigoths was evident across all the Iberian Peninsula.

For my study area, apart from archaeological data, we have some historical information, such as the correspondence by Ausonius (based at Bordeaux) with his friend Paulinus of Nola (a bishopric in the Naples region, Italy), during the latter's trip to *Hispania*, which offers details of the state of some of the urban centres towards the close of the fourth century: for instance, in one letter, Ausonius (*Ep.* 29, 50–61) claimed that the *Ilerda*, *Bilbilis* and *Calagurris* were ruinous and inhospitable places. Such statements have long been used to corroborate the hypothesis of the end of urban life during Late Antiquity. However, we need to re-evaluate such letters, bearing in mind Ausonius' main aim of wanting to convince his friend to quit the territory and come back to *Burdigalia*. In fact, Paulinus, who, unlike Ausonius, knew *Hispania* well, responded (*Carm.* X, 202–238) by stressing that *Hispania* still had many splendid, active and hospitable cities such as *Caesaraugusta*, *Barcino* and *Tarraco* (Arce 1982, 88; Martínez Gázquez 1973). Despite Paulinus' words, it has been Ausonius' pessimistic viewpoint that has, for decades, prevailed among modern historiographers. Such scholars have likewise focussed on the Chronicle of Hydatius, which recounts some of the main politico-military events in the Iberian Peninsula between AD 409 and 468, generating a generally bleak picture for these territories – one full of disasters, hardships and decay. However,

although Hydatius relates the capture of diverse cities and describes also looting across *Hispania* and cruel massacres by the barbarians, this sad panorama does not yet find any clear archaeological support: thus far, we have only traces of destruction for the *territorium* of *Lucus* (besieged in 460) and *Asturica* (468) and, in our study area, in the *Caesaraugustum regionem* (assailed in 449) (see Arce 2005, 216–217).

Hydatius also relates that the Upper and Middle Ebro Valley suffered from raids by *Bagaudae*. These groups and their actions, much debated, are reported on also in Gaul and were probably peasants, tenants and slaves rebelling against large landowners but are seen especially as a symptom of and a reaction to the decline of the imperial power and economic security. Such attacks affected also cities like *Turiaso*, whose bishop Leo was killed in the town's defence, and *Ilerda*, which in 449 was sacked by a band comprising both *bagaudae* and Suevi (Arce 2005, 159–167). But we likely cannot establish any direct link between urban decay and *bagaudae* because, apart from the episodes mentioned, the remainder of the cities of the Ebro Valley do not seem to have been hit. Interestingly, most of these Bagaudic uprisings took place predominantly in rural contexts – we hear that the rural aristocracy, lacking imperial (i.e. official military) assistance, had serious problems dealing with these attacks that, undoubtedly, threatened their landholding, resources and manpower; there was probably recourse to estate militia to defend properties, perhaps buying up of mercenaries, but no trace is known yet of actual defences at villa sites. Town authorities, meanwhile, may have sought to improve their urban defences (Espinosa Ruiz 2006a, 68–69).

Archaeological guides for tracking the evolution or devolution of the towns of this Ebro area remain fairly patchy (Fig. 15.1), as is very much true for *Ilerda*; in the case of late antique *Turiaso* available evidence is focused on the episcopal church and the recent excavation inside the medieval cathedral (Casabona 1998; *id.* 2012, 24–37). Nevertheless, it should be noted that the urban situation in the *Tarraconensis* province is far from homogeneous since we have important data regarding the urban characteristics of *Tarraco*, which saw an important continuity, and even a flourishing, during the fourth and fifth centuries, as also seems true for *Caesaraugusta* (Escribano Paño 1998), *Gerunda* (Nolla Brufau 1988; Nolla Brufau *et al.* 2009) and *Barcino* (key overviews are Beltrán de Heredia 2001, 2008 and 2010). This crucial urban role continued for these sites until the arrival of the Muslims and, in many cases, beyond.

But there are also medium-sized or lesser towns in the same province that never experienced that kind of monumentalisation and which languished in this period. Although the network of cities and towns of *Tarraconensis* province, in its basic characteristics, remained almost entirely unchanged into the fourth century, the wider landscape started to change between the fifth and sixth

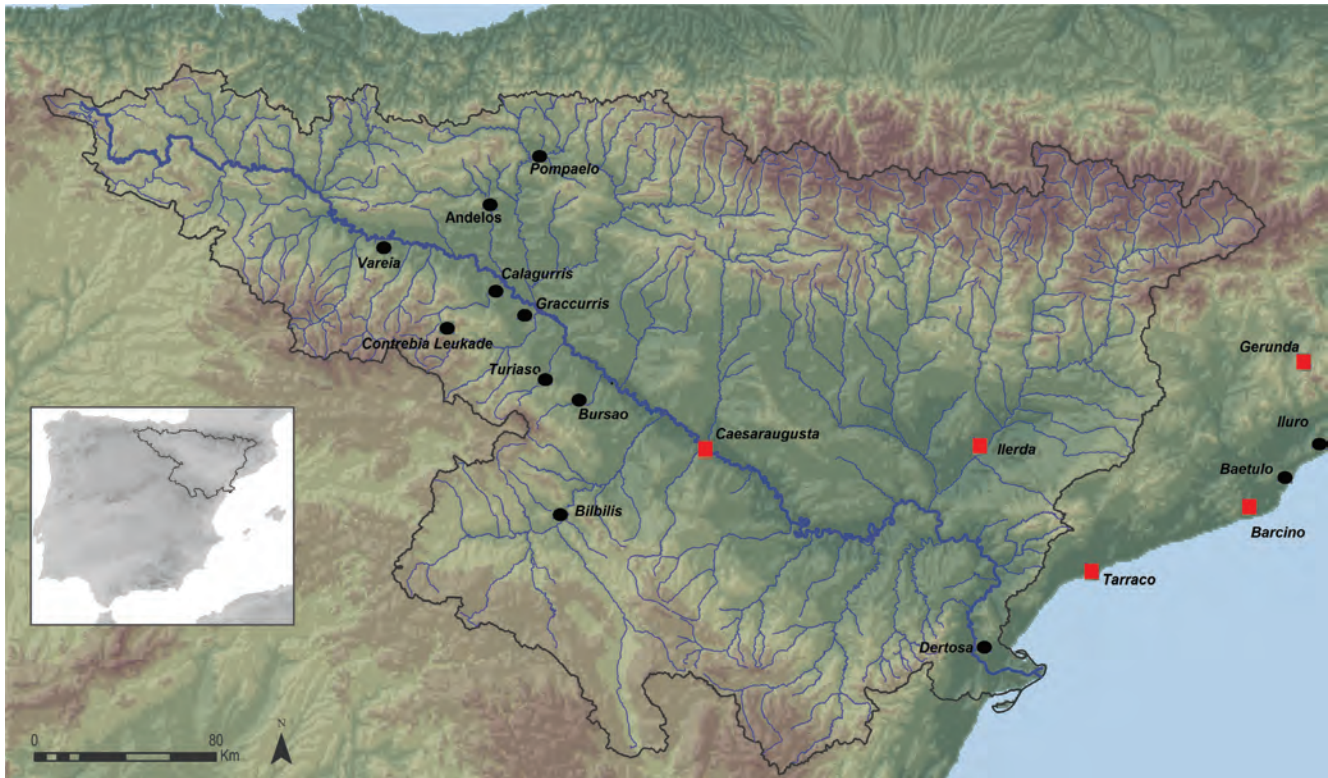


Figure 15.1 Principal urban centres named in the text (image: author)

century, when in some of the small *civitates* abandonment of their structures began. This situation is especially evident in the Middle Ebro basin. Archaeologically, for example, we can trace neglect at *Vareia*, with intermittent activity until its complete abandonment in the sixth century (Espinosa Ruiz 1997, 51–52), and at *Bursau*, *Graccurris* and *Andelos*, each marked by shrinkage of their urban structure (Each is analysed with a detailed bibliography in Espinosa Ruiz 2006a, 46–53). At *Graccurris*, there is only scattered evidence for late antique activity, implying a low-density population level; unusually, a revitalisation comes here in the seventh century only to see complete site abandonment in the early ninth century (Hernández Vera *et al.* 1995; Martínez Torrecilla and Del Fresno Bernal 2006). Similarly, at *Contrebia Leukade*, a re-occupation of the ancient structures occurs at the end of the sixth century or in the first decades of the seventh (Hernández Vera and Matínez Torrecilla 1995, 16–22), after an intense decay of the urban monuments from the late Roman period; in fact, the last Roman evidence is a small pottery workshop active from the end of the fourth century until the first half of the fifth (Hernández Vera *et al.* 2015).

Thus, in general terms, by the mid-fifth century, both the historical and archaeological data support the idea that small and medium-sized towns in the Middle Ebro basin suffered a notable downturn. Only *Turiaso*, *Calagurris* and *Pompaelo*, each of these episcopal sees, continued, generally without

great upheavals, into the Middle Ages (Espinosa Ruiz 1997, 50–51, 2006a, 76–77).

A diverse situation seems to prevail in the Catalan area, however, above all along the coastline, where *Baetulo* (Badalona), *Iluro* (Mataró) and *Dertosa* (Tortosa) show a much clearer continuity archaeologically (Járrega Domínguez 2005, 157–158). In many cases, we have information about Christian religious complexes that became core in the modified organisation of the towns, but sometimes strong stratigraphic sequences are uncovered, such as in the Plaza de Olivera of Tortosa, extending from the fifth century until the present (Cartes Reverté 2014, 133–135). Here, continuity is also evident via the notable quantity of imports, including North African pottery that arrived until the first decades of the sixth century. Noticeably, from the fifth century an upturn in imports from the Eastern Mediterranean is observed that continues into the sixth, although this century is marked by a predominance of North African materials, above all amphorae (Járrega Domínguez 2009, 175–178).

These differences within *Tarraconensis* suggest that, apart from the capitals of *Tarraco* and *Caesaraugusta* and some coastal cities like *Barcino* and *Gerunda*, the fifth and sixth centuries witness a prominent destabilisation of the *civitates* network of the Ebro basin. Does this indicate a concentration of traders, elites and administrators in the coastal centres? Does this therefore mean a weakened control of inland territories? Does the inland area of the

Ebro basin see diminished agricultural output? Does the control and working of the land break up? If so, when, how and why? Below we explore the landscape's archaeologies of settlement and economy.

The Rural Picture: A 'Chaotic' Landscape?

Archaeological studies of late Roman rural contexts in north-eastern Spain do not really differ much from other areas of the Peninsula and the best known types of settlement of this period are without doubt the *villae*. However, other kinds of rural habitats are known, both of agglomerate type such as *vici* and *pagi* and dispersed habitats, such as *casae* and *tuguria* (Tarpin 2002). But the reality is that interest in the monumental parts of the *villae* have long been the basis of most archaeological studies and these have enabled a good understanding of the sequence of use of these lived spaces. In the Ebro basin, villas originate from the later Republican period, although their peak is in the High Empire (Prévosti *et al.* 2013). There were notable differences in the productive activity of these sites between the Catalan coastal strip, focussed on industries using derivatives from fish, wine and oil, and the inland territories with agricultural specialisms, centred on vineyards and olive groves (Chavarría Arnau 2006). The general trend that we can observe in both groups of *villae* is that they enjoyed an intensive restoration and monumentalisation, above all in their *pars urbana*, in the fourth century, fitting in with the phenomenon in the western and central Mediterranean of a concentration of ownership and the affirmation of elites (Ariño Gil and Díaz Marínez 2002). In some cases, though, the chronology of these highs can be delayed, especially if we take into account the style of the mosaics (Fig. 15.2), such as at the *villae* of Tossa de Mar (Gerona) and Rienda (Zaragoza), datable to the fifth century, and at Estada (Huesca) and Vilagrassa (Lérida), of the late fifth or early sixth century (Gorges 1979; Chavarría Arnau 2006, 25–27). And we even see the restoration and repairs to baths in the *villa* of Cal·lípolis (Tarragona) in the sixth century (Macías Solé 2000).

These cases are exceptions in a general picture of change in the original aristocratic use of the villa sites around the mid-fifth century. In the past, historians linked these transformations to destructions caused first by Suevic, Vandal and Alan invaders, and then by the struggles between these groups, the Hispano-Romans and the Visigoths. And yet the archaeological evidence does not show any clear reflection of this claim and we do not find destruction levels in the fifth-century layers (Chavarría Arnau 2005, 269). This does not of course mean that these incursions did not affect the *villae*; in fact, warfare, together with the wider disintegration of the Roman economic and social structure and the concomitant collapse of the rural organisation, were core in the process of the emergence of a diverse settlement landscape, in which the *villae* – at least in the form with



Figure 15.2 Mosaic from the villa at Estada, Huesca (photo: J. Garrido. Courtesy of Museo de Zaragoza)

which they were known before – played no significant role. Instead, what we find is a different functionality for these spaces, with the characteristic aristocratic residential features lost, to be replaced by huts, *silos* and *fossae* – the latter two almost always linked to the processes of agricultural production and storage, plus craft activities and refuse deposition. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to find graveyards and small chapels or churches set up in or near these ancient *villae* (a recent overview of the process of transformation of the *villae* is by Ariño Gil 2013, 99–106).

In the Ebro valley, this transition to a 'productive trend', supplanting the monumental structures, is evident in many examples such as in the pressing plants set up in the *villae* of Can Sans, Sant Boi and L'Espelt (all in the province of Barcelona) and at the *villae* of Vilauba (Camòs, Gerona) and Puig Rodón (Corça, Gerona), where wine and oil production became more prominent, lasting perhaps into the seventh century (Nolla Brufau and Casas 1990; Castanyer *et al.* 2011). Meanwhile, pottery finds suggest that occupation at the *villae* of Els Munts (Tarragona) and Torre Llauder (Mataró, Barcelona) (Prevosti and Clariana 1993; Macías

Solé 2005, 78–86) continued until the seventh century. From the ceramics we can chart a seemingly shorter occupation to *villae* in the inland territories,² here often with a residual occupation extending no further than the mid-fifth century (Chavarría Arnau 2006), as seen at Cabriana (Miranda de Ebro), Las Musas (Arellano, Navarra) and El Ramalete, La Malena (Azuara, Zaragoza) and Romeral (Albesa, Lérida) (all sites detailed in the catalogue in Chavarría Arnau 2007). Some exceptions do exist in the interior, such as the villa of La Pesquera (Tarazona, Zaragoza), for which ceramic finds, including imports from Narbonensis and North Africa, imply activity into the sixth century (Paz Peralta 1980); and, most strikingly, the extraordinary case of Parpalinas (Pipaona de Ocón, La Rioja), a *villa* in the *territorium* of *Calagurris*, which saw continuity into the eighth century and which also featured a church, with an initial phase of c. AD 500 (Espinosa 2006b; Espinosa Ruiz 2011, 189–191). Furthermore, the testimony of the *Vita Sancti Aemiliani*, composed in the seventh century (see Valcarcel 1997; Castellanos 1995, 2004), reveals that, in the mid-sixth century, Parpalinas was a property of the *senator* Honorius; it is in fact possible to identify something of the significance of this man and his family of *potentiores* in this area of the Upper Ebro (Espinosa Ruiz 2003, 79–109, 2011, 181).

Currently, however, Parpalinas, seems exceptional in the Ebro valley. In the middle basin, more precisely in the Aragonese region, for every hundred agrarian settlements documented between the first and the third centuries AD, only eleven continued or were still active during the fourth and fifth centuries (Paz Peralta 2001, 548), such as Camino de la Vega de Albalate (Calanda) and Boquera del Regallo II (Chiprana), both with a peak (based on the ceramic evidence) in the first decades of the fourth century but with a premature end before the start of the fifth century (Laliena and Ortega 2005, 58–60). The case of the noted luxurious *villa* of La Malena shows a wider continuity, with commercial exchanges continuing in this area to the mid-fifth century, but without clear site occupation in the second half of that century (Royo Guillén 2003, 78–83, 86–87).

In the well-studied area between the Guadalope and Martín rivers (Laliena and Ortega 2005; Laliena 2009), both tributaries of the Ebro, the best known *villae* of Las Lomas del Regadío and Campo del Palacio continued during the first half of the fourth century, but not into the fifth. By contrast, the site of el Barranco de la Tía Matea (Samper de Calanda, Teruel) seemingly persists into the seventh century; however, this was a farm, not a *villa* (*ibid.*, 47–48, 50–56).

As well as an increasing emphasis on productive activities, the main characteristics of these new or ‘revised’ occupation phases comprise the insertion of hearths and timber partitions in rooms once boasting mosaics and the construction of new walls or repair of the old in poor quality materials, often wood and clay, without mortar. Often such reuse and reworking occurred more in peripheral, not former

core built zones of the *villae* (Gurt i Esparraguera and Navarro 2005; Roig Buxó 2009, 215), as observed at the Plaza Mayor area of Castellar del Vallès (Barcelona), where a small village of timber huts grew up between the decayed villa’s productive and residential sectors (Roig Buxó and Coll 2007; Roig Buxó 2009, 215–217).

Sometimes this occupation activity in and around the old villas led to the emergence of villages in the Visigothic period (the sixth and seventh centuries), as seen in the cases of Aiguacut, Can Palau and Can Cabassa in the province of Barcelona (*ibid.*, 221–223). As seen, building technologies were far removed from those of the Roman heyday, although timber and clay had long been present in lower-level peasant farms; however, these emergent villages do show a level of order and organisation in the distribution of domestic units, productive areas and burials (*ibid.*, 214–215). Where burial grounds occur, these were usually associated with a church (Chavarría Arnau 2007, 143–152). Potentially these only appeared once the residential use of the old villa site had vanished (*ibid.*, 143), although sometimes these co-existed. Known cases are Parpalinas and villa Fortunatus (Fraga, Huesca),³ which features a *chrismon* in a mosaic (which also records the name Fortunatus), dated to the end of the fourth century, while the first phase of the church belongs to c. AD 420–430. In fact, it has been suggested that in this phase we can recognise a private oratory or *martyrium* and, in a second phase, when an apse was added (around the first decades of the sixth century), a basilica (Godoy 1995, 230–232). Nevertheless, this separation is not fully accepted and recent studies prefer to see the imposition here of a basilica from the outset (Sales Carbonell 2012). Burials in fact came to be made over the ruins of the *thermae* of the villa; later, in the Early Middle Ages, tombs were also placed inside the basilica. The church did not survive beyond the Islamic conquest of the early eighth century (*ibid.*, 85–88).

In this area, there are few cases of such religious buildings inserted inside an ancient *villa*. One famous but problematic case is Centcelles, close to Tarraco, which for many years was viewed as a villa with a religious and/or funerary building (the history of research here is in Chavarría 2007, 186–189; Sales Carbonell 2012, 300–303); however, this view has been challenged by a new study that proposes a military function. More precisely, it has been suggested that the building was built in the first half of the fifth century and what we see currently was the central area of a late Roman military camp. Tarraco for most of the fifth century, appears in written sources as the headquarters for the imperial armies sent to recover the whole *Hispania*, and so this building could relate to a quartering of troops, with a control centre (*principia*), commander’s residence (*praetorium*) and military baths (Remolà and Pérez 2003). The villa, according to this new interpretation, never existed, and the construction of this building had, from its origin, a clear military role. The stratigraphy of this building seems



Figure 15.3 Domestic structures excavated at Torre Quemada II (photo: courtesy of C. Laliena and J. Ortega)

to be clearly related with a fifth-century horizon, when many of the aristocratic *villae* in Spain were almost abandoned or, at least, had lost their aristocratic character. However, this view is not universally accepted and some scholars retain the traditional view of a ‘never-ended’ villa, but which changed its functionality into a religious one (see Hauschild and Arbeiter 1993); and others stress the magnificent character of this building and its iconographic decoration as surely suggestive of a high-ranking civilian or ecclesiastic (Arce 1994 and 2002).

Another potential example is based on a toponymic indication at the villa of Era Forcada (Chalamera, Huesca), namely ‘La Iglesia’, suggestive of a lost but related church or a chapel, although no archaeological evidence exists for this yet (Sales Carbonell 2012, 81–82). There are also examples of medieval churches built over ancient Roman *villae*, sometimes associated with late antique necropoleis, which perhaps had late antique precursors, yet to be identified: potential examples include the hermitage of Santa María (Chalamera, Huesca), the late antique basilica of Cornellà (Barcelona) and Sant Miquel in the villa of Els Ametllers (Tossa del Mar, Gerona) (*ibid*, 81, 171, 274).

Besides the re-occupation and second life of *villae* sites, after abandonments by the fifth century, we need to consider *ex-novo* open village and hamlet sites in the plains, which

usually appeared from the sixth century. In the Catalan area (Roig Buxó 2009, 224–230, 2011) many such sites are known, characterised by sunken-feature huts built in timber and clay. Some villages have associated necropoleis, but as yet none contain a church. Interesting examples were located close to *Barcino*: the settlements of Can Gambús-1 and Los Mallols, dated to between the sixth century and the mid-seventh or eighth; at each, domestic structures and numerous *silos* (c. 230 for the former and c. 140 for the latter) were documented; furthermore, small necropoleis appeared close to these settlements, although in both cases some inhumations were made inside *silos*, together with refuse (Roig Buxó 2009, 224–229).

In the Aragonese territory, although we currently have less information than in Cataluña, it seems that many *villae* were abandoned and a diverse settlement network began to emerge without any clear connection with the preceding Roman organisation. Fieldwork between the Guadalope and Martín rivers shows around 30 *ex-novo* settlements emerging between the fifth and tenth century. In the case of Torre Quemada II (Fig. 15.3), settlement ran from the fifth to eighth century and featured houses built with earth/clay walls set on stone plinths and with thatch or reed roofs. These settlements often had a nearby necropolis, some with tombs excavated into the bedrock,

as at Las Lastras de San José (Albalate del Arzobispo) and Planas de Esponera (Alcañiz), dated between the sixth and seventh century (Laliena 2009, 153–154). In contrast there are seemingly isolated Visigothic necropoleis at Alto de la Barrilla (Cuarte de Huerva, Zaragoza) (Saenz Preciado *et al.* 2007, 209–210) and La Varella-Castellar (Codo, Zaragoza),⁴ with no associated settlement sites yet identified.

In both Aragonese and Catalan regions, these communities occupied fertile areas with ploughland in the immediate vicinity and lay very close to each other. None were defended nor did they have a church. Despite these general characteristics, we might observe that two of the most important archaeological sites for this period, long known, lacked these characteristics: the first of these, El Bovalar (Serós, Lérida), was traditionally identified as a Visigothic settlement with cemetery and basilica complex, with the village seemingly emerging in connection with the basilica (Palol 1989, 1999, 145–146), until its destruction in the eighth century. However, a more recent interpretation is as a monastic complex (Gurt i Esparraguera 2007). The second site is the *castellum* of Puig Rom (Rosas, Gerona), a well defended hilltop settlement, c. 225 m above sea level, whose chronology runs from the sixth century fully across the seventh (Palol 2004). Although a settlement of defensive character, its population was strongly agrarian, since the archaeology recovered a significant number of agricultural tools, cooking pots and amphorae. Nevertheless, both sites are currently exceptions in the rural landscape of the Ebro basin, in which the re-use of ancient *villae* and the development of *ex-novo* settlement were the general trend.

In other areas of the Iberian Peninsula, notable in the post-classical landscape is the so-called ‘hilltop phenomenon’, marked by an occupation or reoccupation of upland and hilltop sites. Some politico-military correlation can be made: examples occur, for instance, in the north-west of the Peninsula, in the area assigned to the Suevic Kingdom and at its limits with the Visigothic one (Ariño Gil and Diaz Martinez 2014); likewise these sites appear in the south-east, in the area of the Visigothic–Byzantine frontier (the Byzantines forged a restricted territory/province here from the AD 550s to 620s). In the northerly Catalan area, apart from Puig Rom, we can cite the well-known cases of Sant Julià de Ramis and the *clausurae* to the Pertús–Clusa Alta pass and Castell del Moros – both of these military *castella* being key to the defence and control of the ancient *Via Augusta* and this territory of contact in the Pyrenees, between the fourth century and the first decades of the sixth (Nolla Brufau 2015, 46–48). San Julià de Ramis, the largest of these and the one with a more coherent spatial organisation, is a ‘classic’ example of a late Iron Age/Iberian hilltop, sporadically inhabited still during Roman times, but re-occupied permanently in the fourth century AD. Close to *Gerunda*, the *castellum*’s role in the defence of the city lasted until the second decade of the eighth century, when it

was abandoned (Burch *et al.* 2006, 55–60). At some point in the Visigothic period, a chapel was erected here; this in fact endured beyond the end of the military phase, continuing as parish centre until it was replaced, c. AD 1000, by the current church (Burch *et al.* 2006, 63–76).

Apart from these potentially ‘official’ strategic defended sites, a small number of upland, but undefended hamlets, of small size (125–500 m²), are known in the Pre-Pyrenees to indicate a wider adoption of upland settlement. These sites, lacking antecedent Roman activity, include Vilaclara (Castellfollit del Boix, Barcelona) and Collet dels Clapers (Pinos, Lérida) (Enrich *et al.* 1995; Guàrdia 2000; Roig Buxó 2009, 230–231).

In the Middle Ebro basin, in the Aragonese region, such hilltop occupation seems to be marginal. One possible site is Torcas (Chodes, Zaragoza), for which the authors of an archaeological survey observe how ‘the summit is fortified by rock shaping and reinforcing with stone walls the natural defense of the mountain’.⁵ Arguably, upland relocation occurs at the urban centre of *Bursao* (Borja), contracting to its summital area, ‘La Corona’ (Fig. 15.4), where occupation continued until the Islamic period (Aguilera and Blasco 2004, 97–98).

A clearer, much more prominent area for such hilltop settlement is La Rioja. Here, recent work points to an interesting *castra* network, perhaps active from the seventh century, with seemingly exclusive military occupation (Tejado Sebastián 2011). These sites probably relate to the strategic control of access lines into the interior of the Peninsula by the Visigothic State, especially in its final phase when increased attention went on communication routes and trade traffic between La Meseta and the northern areas. Thus, social instability and the necessities of closer socio-economic control may lie behind this defensive network (Tejado Sebastián 2014).

A final new (or renewed) site type, also with a stronger presence in the north-west, chiefly in more mountainous areas, comprises caves. Such late antique occupation has been recognised in the Astur–Leones area (Fanjul 2011), the Basque Country (Quirós Castillo and Alonso Martín 2008) and in La Rioja (Tejado Sebastián 2011, 171). But as we get closer to the Middle Ebro basin, fewer examples are known. Close to the *civitates* of *Bursao* and *Turiaso*, we can cite the caves of Moncín and Majaladares (Fig. 15.5), where traces of Visigothic-period occupation are evident, following intermittent use since the Bronze Age. These caves are generally compact, which would likely point to occasional use, as temporary hiding places or refuges for locals, or maybe, as often proposed, used by groups of *bagaudae*, who are attested in this region in the fifth century (Aguilera and Blasco 2004, 103). However, there are also examples of caves revealing sporadic usage related to local economic activities, as at El Moro of Olvena (Huesca), with an intermittent occupation in the Roman



Figure 15.4 View of the urban centre of Borja, ancient Bursao, and the hilltop site of 'La Corona' (photo: courtesy of E. Lacleta, Centro de Estudios Borjanos)



Figure 15.5 The Cave of Moncín, close to Borja (photo: courtesy of I. Aguilera, Centro de Estudios Borjanos)

and late antique periods, and a likely used by shepherds and perhaps for storage (Aguilera 1996). As yet there are no secure examples of caves with more stable occupation in our study area. In addition, some caves were adapted for religious uses, including as hermits' cells, such as with the groups documented in the middle Catalan region (Enrich *et al.* 2000) and in La Rioja (Monreal Jimeno 1989; Riaño

1995), set very close to the tributaries of the River Ebro. The cited Saint Emilianus (Castellanos 1995, 1998) is a good example of a holy man living in a hermitage, who attracted followers, who then created in this area chambers for accommodation, storage and an *oratorium*, in which the saint was eventually inhumed. Later, this space evolved into the monastery of San Millán de la Cogolla. Besides the noted El Bovalar, other possible monasteries lay between the episcopal sees of *Ilerda* and *Vregllum*, probably linked to control of livestock and of transhumance routes (Sales Carbonell and Salazar Ortiz 2013).

In sum, distinct from the traditional Roman landscape organized around the villa system, the late antique and early medieval landscape featured many poles of attraction, ranging from the decayed and adapted *villae* sites to the new hamlets and villages, hilltop sites and cave habitats. Alongside these we need to assess the (growing) presence of the Church, with monasteries, rural churches and hermitages, as a diverse, invigorating element in the territory. But does this range of sites create a sensation of a disorganised or chaotic countryside, with its human spaces emerging without coherent planning or control? Or are we failing to recognise organisation behind some at least of these changes? This

is, for the moment, a difficult question to answer, although we should expect that some hierarchy and structure was involved in this transformed landscape, whether peasants coming together as communities, monks establishing bases, local leaders establishing some authority via a hilltop site, and family farming groups exploiting old villa remains. Clearly, more data from site excavations and finds analyses are essential to give scope to tackle these questions.

Discussion

How then should we interpret all the currently available data? Do the settlement changes and their diverse forms signify new powers, different strategies by farmers, a much altered economy, and/or a changed organisation of the landscape? And what issues remain with our evidence? First, we should recognise that the Ebro basin was the last area of the Iberian Peninsula to cut the umbilical cord that linked this territory with the Western Roman Empire. In fact, the arrival of Suevi, Vandals and Alans in AD 409 had no clear impact in this territory, which lay outside of the agreement and division of the Hispanic lands, which did not include the provinces of *Tarraconensis*, *Insulae Balearis* and *Mauritania*. ‘Roman rule’ thus persisted in our study area until the last quarter of the fifth century, when Rome’s allies, the Visigoths, expanded also into this area: the conquest of *Tarraconensis* by their King Euric (between 470–475), was completed with the *manu militari* capture of the *maritimae civitates* of the Catalan coast.

Yet the Visigothic takeover did not mean a major transformation of the principal cities of this area or their role in the *territorium*; indeed, *Caesaraugusta*, *Ilerda*, *Gerunda*, *Barcino* and *Tarraco* seem to have continued to function as cores of large territories and as political and religious centres. In contrast, we do see a large array of lesser towns, *civitates*, suffering an intensive weakening in this period, especially in the inland zones. Over the fifth and sixth centuries, towns such as *Andelos* and *Vareia* were abandoned or decayed substantially, while others, such as *Bursao*, suffered notable setbacks, taking on an almost ruralised character, albeit remaining active. This urban crisis in the inland territories is even more evident where towns fell into full or near-full abandonment only to see some revival in the seventh century until the Emiral period, before they were completely abandoned in the ninth or tenth century, as occurs at *Graccurris* and *Contrebia Leukade*.

Yet this process was not homogeneous across all the Ebro basin, since decline seems to have been less pronounced in the Catalan area, where many *civitates* survived to exercise an important role in the landscape. Similarly, there was a disparate development in the rural contexts, where, again, a ‘two-speed’ evolution is documented. In fact, the fortunes of the *villae*, in many cases located very close to these towns, appears closely related to their urban evolution: thus, it is

normal to find a higher survival rate of *villae* in the Catalan area, where *civitates* were more stable and resilient than in the Middle Ebro basin. The second half of the fifth century then marked a clear break in the trajectory of the *villae*, which until then had overall witnessed an intensive and frequently monumental programme of activity in the fourth century, but which appears fairly short-lived, because, soon after, there was a shift to more productive roles.

This productive trend ran parallel to a less luxurious or more ‘functional’ character to the *villae*. Nevertheless, while in the altered Catalan area a few *villae* might sometimes endure into the seventh century, in the Middle Ebro basin a majority lay abandoned before the end of the fifth century. I say ‘altered’ because, obviously, these *villae* were now something different from the aristocratic residences that they used to be. Spaces were re-used and the mosaics neglected and the sites became almost always oriented to farming. It is interesting to note that this survival sometimes generated new villages, occasionally with a small church or oratory established on or adjacent to the ancient structures. According to Ariño (2013, 104–106; this volume), this could be a clear sign of the presence of an enduring aristocracy in these modified *villae* sites, perhaps not always as a physical presence, but still as the owners of the *fundus*. This probable aristocratic continuity in property-holding is, in fact, also related to the presence of agricultural facilities for speculative crops, such as wine and oil, surely be generated for an income. Perhaps this aristocracy now had their residences in the better defended towns and cities, but maintained their rural properties as a source of revenues.

In this landscape in transition, the emergence of *ex-novo* open villages is something really new in the settlement pattern. These villages appeared across all areas of the Ebro basin and always display similar characteristics, such as a lack of clear planning, defences or churches. Such characteristics probably highlight the absence of any private aristocratic initiatives and point instead to lower status collectives – although any village would need some initiative. Diverse are *El Bovalar*, a probable monastic complex, and *Sant Julià de Ramis*, a defended *castellum* with basilica, whose importance in the defence of *Gerunda* ensured an intense politico-military role and the probable presence of a local authority and a fixed garrison.

Sant Julià de Ramis and the noted case of *Puig Rom* are again notable exceptions in a picture completed by a scarce level of hilltop (re-)occupations compared with other peninsular areas. However, some interesting examples, probably part of a later phenomenon from the seventh century, do appear in the northern areas which have a less urbanised image, and which may signify a need for an arrangement of *castra* and *turres* to guarantee security and stability. Indeed, the revitalisation in this period of some *civitates*, such as *Contrbia Leukade* and *Graccurris*, may be part of the same process. A reflection of this insecurity may

even lie in the use/reuse of caves, as domestic spaces and/or as emergency refuges. Again, these cave habitats seem to be less common in the Middle Ebro basin than in the Upper basin, in La Rioja and Basque Country.

In conclusion, this panorama – always mediated by the quantity and quality of the archaeological data available – shows an intensive period of change in the settlement patterns of the Ebro basin. While true that the amount of information for the Catalan area is greater than for other areas of the basin, we can use our current knowledge to generate a provisional assessment. While the Roman centuries displayed – albeit always with some small exceptions – a general homogeneity in the characteristics of landscape settlement, use and organisation, the fifth century inaugurated a phase of progressive change and adjustment, with a largely contrasting evolution of rural and urban contexts between the Middle Ebro basin and its maritime area. It is difficult to offer a single reason for this geographical contrast; rather we might consider a set of issues – late Roman economic decay in light of western Roman traumas, reduced external demands for exports, breakdowns in supply, marginalisation of some internal sites – impacting. For the fifth century we should not yet be talking of the emergence of local powers (something claimed to help explain comparable changes in other peninsular areas) since this was a region that remained in imperial hands until the last quarter of the fifth century, yet we cannot deny that many changes were already evident in the first decades of the fifth century.

The agents of this process of change are still not properly understood. Archaeology continues to have problems in identifying people in the excavation record and while for the Roman landscape one current difficulty is knowing where and how the ordinary peasants lived in relation to the luxurious *villae* and other rural settlements, so in the late antique and early medieval landscapes the major concern is the ‘invisibility’ of the elites. Thanks to the historical sources, we know a little about movements by the *bacaudes/bagaudae* and about some of the tensions in the Peninsula prior to the definitive establishment of the Visigothic State; but in reality there is no coherent archaeology to connect to these. We can envisage a socio-economic insecurity that probably was the basis of many of the noted transformations, but was this a spontaneous process? Was there any clear pattern or trend to it? Why are there so many contrasts between one area of the Ebro valley and another?

Overall, the main differences are evident in the survival rate of the *villae* and in the weakening of the urban network, which was more significant in the inland territories. Nevertheless, some common features appear, such as the emergence of an *ex-novo* settlement pattern across the whole Ebro basin, which was one of the principal elements of transformation over the ruins of the ancient Roman landscape. Perhaps this is the moment to think about the existence of a ‘Visigothic

landscape’, in which towns and cities largely persisted and where the novelty is based on a different settlement trend. New villages and hamlets, with scarce social differentiation, were the seeds of this modified pattern, in which the distinction between the rural and urban facies was not always clear. How these components of the same landscape interrelated and operated in this transitional post-classical period is the crucial question that research, especially detailed site-specific excavation, must tackle in the near future.

Notes

- 1 This paper has been written as part of the MED-FARWEST project based at the University of Leicester and funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 658045.
- 2 For Aragon, useful first efforts to clarify the regional ceramics are in Hernández Vera and Bienes 2004. Chavarría Arnau (2006, 17–35) points out that, imported ceramics, for the most part, did not reach inland territories. Future studies may potentially recognise local wares of the sixth and seventh century which may extend the use of the *villae* beyond c. AD 500.
- 3 Key earlier scholarship on these includes: Serra Ràfols 1943, 6–35; Puertas Tricas 1972, 71–81; Schlunk and Hauschild 1978, 162–163; Palol 1989, 2000–2004, 1999, 193–194; Ripoll-Velázquez 1999, 133–135; Escribano and Fatás 2001, 65–79. For a detailed, up-to-date analysis, considering all trends and approaches, see Sales Carbonell 2012, 85–91.
- 4 See Gimeno Martínez (ed.), *Arqueología Aragonesa (1995–2005)*, CD of Archaeological Records: *Prospecciones arqueológicas en la cuenca media del río Aguasvivas, Teruel y Zaragoza*. (Exp. 034/99). Director: Susana Catalán Garzarán.
- 5 Gimeno Martínez (ed.), *Arqueología Aragonesa (1995–2005)*, CD of Archaeological Records: *Prospecciones arqueológicas en la comarca del Jalón Medio – La Almunia de doña Godina, Almonacid de la Sierra, Alpartir, Bardallur, Calatorao, Chodes, Épila, Lucena, Lumpiaque, Morata de Jalón, Plasencia* (Exp. 034/99). Directors: Manuel Medrano Marqués and María Antonia Díaz Sanz.

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Spatial Inequality and the Formation of an Early Medieval Landscape in the Centre of the Iberian Peninsula

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Introduction

Recent archaeological research in the Iberian Peninsula points to the consolidation in the sixth century AD of a process of social change that resulted in the emergence of a new landscape. A number of important factors must be considered for the analysis of the material record that bears witness to this process. Firstly, studies have been undertaken from an excessively homogeneous and ethnocentric perspective, which has obscured a number of transformations that, as demonstrated by closer reading of the archaeological record, were much more complex and dynamic than hitherto recognised. Secondly, we should recognise that, essentially, this complexity involves the co-existence of different production levels, archaeologically expressed by a diverse social structure, in contrast with the traditional view of a homogenous society (Olmo-Enciso 1992, 187, 195–196, 2015, 17). This is particularly obvious in terms of the Iberian Peninsula, which is characterised by cultural diversity.¹

It is true that analysis must begin with tradition, a construction of the memory of the past. This process has, to a large extent, defined the interpretation of the period as marked by the collapse of late Roman society and the emergence of early medieval societies. This process has traditionally been interpreted from a Western, nationalist perspective which was developed and consolidated in the nineteenth century. As a result, the prevailing Eurocentric view lay at the core of the formulation, also for this period, of an artificial European historical narrative. The interpretive framework has, therefore, been used as a structure with which to homogenise unequal and variously complex historical realities, for instance in the eastern and western Mediterranean and Northern Europe (I have examined different historiographical trends within this tradition

elsewhere: Olmo-Enciso 2015, 17). The application of this historic-cultural paradigm is also characterised by the extreme selectivity with which research topics are chosen: ethnicity, Christianisation of urban topography and, more recently, urban and rural environments, peasantry and elites. I have already questioned the need to leave behind an interpretation of historical processes based on dichotomies: we/the other; peasants/elites; cities/urban landscapes, etc. (*ibid*, 17). These dichotomies result from the application of a binary perspective based on aprioristic arguments generated from the angle of the Eurocentric ‘Western Gaze’ (Bender 1999, 31–45). These constructions have become specialised areas of study and have excluded, by way of selection of research topics, the ‘other’, leading to the deconstruction and decontextualisation of a more complex reality.

Recent research in Europe has revealed evidence of a fragmented landscape, which, at different stages throughout the sixth century, replaced the landscapes that had characterised the late Roman and late antique world. This process of change in the western Mediterranean and Western Europe was not of course regionally identical or equally complex; rather, a clear distinction can be drawn between Northern and Mediterranean Europe (Wickham 2005, 508; Gelichi 2010, 83). In Italy, for instance, the evidence suggests considerable regional diversity already in the sixth century (e.g. Francovich and Hodges 2003, 26; Wickham 2005, 508) and the same applies to much of the Iberian Peninsula, where the process was more or less profound dependent on regional trajectories; and whereas northern Iberia followed a similar path to Northern Europe, the remaining regions were more closely connected with Mediterranean dynamics (Olmo-Enciso 1992, 187, 2015, 16).

Within this context, recent and current research at the Visigothic site of Recopolis in eastern central Spain had the

initial premise that such an urban centre must have been ‘an administrative, political, ideological and economic centre, the spatial expression of a complex society. The city and its territory, it follows, were the reflection of the process of change being undergone by the social structure’ (Olmo Enciso 1998, 110). We sought to leave behind reductionist visions of the city, and instead to integrate the urban phenomenon within a wider social landscape, going beyond the historic-cultural analysis of the site layout which had previously been at the focus of interpretation. The research presented here, therefore, considers diverse scales: indeed, the Project (see note 1) is framed as examination of the local *reality* of the city and its hinterland, and its interpretive contextualisation on a wider regional scale. This framework is key to understanding the social dynamics of the period of Recopolis’ foundation by examining different kinds of geographical areas, sites, production structures and natural environments in the region of the Tagus River basin. To date, such research of urban and rural contexts in this period and area has – as elsewhere – rarely given proper consideration to regional diversity and contexts (Olmo-Enciso 2015, 16–17). However, as will be shown below, the rural and urban archaeological and environmental records can allow for a more integrated approach to the study of a changing society. Contextualising different types of empirical data at the regional level involves underlining the landscape as a dynamic social construction, with richer hues of meaning than hitherto assumed. Therefore, the creation of a dialectic relationship between different kinds of data at the regional scale is key to gaining better perception of social forms and stratification. However, the issue is even more complex: the diversity of cultural shapes adopted by/in the archaeological record suggests that social stratification needs to be interrogated in detail, and not merely assumed (cf Paynter 1982, 22; Olmo-Enciso 2015, 18).

Recopolis: Foundation, Plan and Hinterland

Foundation

The written record documents the *ex-novo* foundation of Recopolis in AD 578 as one of the clearest examples of the power of the Visigothic State at the time of its consolidation, as well as the most prominent material expression of the State’s ideological ‘project’. The paucity of documentary records from the Visigothic period does not diminish the high relevance that the chroniclers assigned to this city’s foundation. Later written testimonies, both in the Andalusi and Christian periods, likewise highlight this event (see Olmo Enciso 2008b, 24–25; 2011, 39, 54–55). Of critical importance in this regard is John of Biclar’s Chronicle for 578: ‘*Liuvigildus rex extinctis undique tyrannis, et pervasoribus Hispaniae superatis sortitus requiem propriam cum plebe resedit civitatem in Celtiberia ex nomine filii*

condidit, quae Recopolis nuncupatur: quam miro opere et in moenibus et suburbanis adornans privilegia populo novae Urbis instituit’ (in Campos 1960, 88)². Isidore of Seville likewise refers in his *Historia Gothorum* to the foundation, linking it with King Leovigild’s determination to consolidate the Visigothic State as a centralised entity, with a strong system of taxation: ‘*Aerarium quoque ac fiscum primus iste auxit, primusque inter suos regali ueste opertus solio resedit, nam ante eum et habitus et consessus communis ut genti, ita et regibus erat. Condidit autem ciuitatem in Celtiberia, quam ex nomine filii Recopolim nominavit*’ (*Historia Gothorum*, 51, 5; Rodríguez Alonso 1975, 258–259). The existence of coins with the legend *RECCOPOLI FECIT* and dated to the reigns of both Leovigild (AD 569–586) and Reccared (586–601) offer an invaluable contemporary testimony. Claude (1965, 177) pointed out the exceptional nature of these coins, which have no parallels in issues struck in other Visigothic mints, giving further proof of the unique character of the city. Ideologically, Leovigild’s coin issues were used to convey and disseminate specific actions of the king in the exercise of the royal authority (see McCormick 1987, 317–318). These literary and numismatic testimonies reflect a clear case of *aemulatio imperii* on the part of King Leovigild, who sought to imitate Byzantium. With the foundation of Recopolis – named after his son Reccared – Leovigild aspired to the level of the Byzantine emperors, who monumentalised and developed cities duly named after members of the imperial family; this practice was also imitated in the Vandal and Ostrogothic kingdoms (Olmo-Enciso 2008a, 44; 2010, 104–105). What makes Recopolis truly exceptional, however, was the *ex-novo* and *a fundamentis* character of the foundation, as the archaeological excavations have confirmed. This is unparalleled in Europe and the Mediterranean during this period, with only the foundation of *Justiniana Prima* in AD 535 as comparable (Ivanisevic 2016).

Furthermore, as will be explored below, the initiative was not limited to the physical foundation of the city, but also involved a prominent re-ordering of the environs, marked by a redesigned road network, the establishment of new rural sites and the reconfiguration of the agro-ecosystem. The scale of these operations could only be undertaken by a fully involved Kingdom and one with the ability to generate and invest a surplus (Olmo-Enciso 2015, 39–41). Noticeably, in the period spanning the late sixth and earlier seventh centuries, the number of tremisses in circulation increased, reflecting the State’s monopoly in issuing coinage (Retamero 2000, 127; Olmo-Enciso 2015, 35; Castro-Priego 2016, 27–30). These are crucial factors for understanding the initial success of this State model and its ability to collect taxes, to invest in infrastructure and to display authority in material wealth and, prominently, in the foundation of Recopolis.

The Site: Design and Contents

Recopolis' city walls enclose an area 21.5 ha in size, occupying the summit of a hill partially embraced by the Tagus River (Fig. 16.1). Archaeological investigations reveal that the site was active for two and a half centuries – from the late sixth to the first half of the ninth centuries – and also into the early Islamic period. The Visigothic phase can be divided into two stages: the first, between the last third of the sixth century and the first half of the seventh, presents evidence for planning of site and infrastructure, the hierarchisation of space and a dynamic urban activity, as well as a substantial process of monumentalisation; the second, commencing in the mid-seventh century, is characterised by modifications to the site layout, a decline in the quality of construction and the loss of the previous dynamism – all changes related to the crisis of the Kingdom and associated social upheaval (Olmo Enciso 1998, 113–117; 2007, 192–193; 2015, 35–37).

Recopolis was defined by a curtain wall approximately 2 km long, equipped with towers and one gate, located at the natural point of access to the hill summit. This gate was one of the most carefully constructed components of the city, erected in masonry and lime mortar-bonded (Gómez de la Torre-Verdejo 2008, 77–86). Our studies confirm the creation of Recopolis *a fundamentis*: excavations reveal that the city was built on a pre-designed plan, which even involved the alteration of the natural topography through substantial terracing, *sondages* for the identification of hard geological strata, which were subsequently worked, plus earthmoving, etc. The plan divided the city into different hierarchically-defined areas, defined from a set of palatial buildings set on the highest elevation and visible from all points of the city as well as from most parts of the surrounding territory (Olmo Enciso 2008a, 47, 2015, 31). The function of this palace complex was administrative, economic, fiscal and logistic (storage) (Olmo-Enciso 1987, 2015, 31). To date, 1.5 hectares of the complex have been excavated, enabling the identification of three major buildings (Fig. 16.2: A1, A2 and A3), the largest of which is 140 m long, plus a church (Fig. 16.2: B), which were arranged to frame a vast courtyard. The church, of cross plan (40×27 m), was masonry-built, fully paved with *opus signinum* and decorated with marble capitals, columns and bases, chancels, and other decorative architectural elements. The masonry civil buildings were two-storied, the top floor featuring more refined architectural elements, with *opus signinum* pavements and decorative units such as marble capitals, columns and bases, chancels and screens panels (Olmo Enciso 2008a, 47–51). The lower floor, paved with lime mortar, likely had a mixed function – administration, tax reckoning and storage – as demonstrated by the discovery in the southern building (Fig. 16.2: A3) of a *statera* associated with fragments of North African amphorae (Olmo-Enciso *et al.*, 2017, 75–106).

Access to the palatial complex was through a monumental gate (Fig. 16.2: C), also built in masonry, that opened to the city's main thoroughfare. Near the palace, two large buildings stood on either side of this street; that to the west of the road was 54×12 m in size, and the eastern one 12×9 m. These buildings hosted commercial and artisanal activities, including shops, warehouses and workshops (Fig. 16.2: D, E); there was evidence here for both glass-making and gold-working (Gómez de la Torre Verdejo 2011, 257–281), and spaces containing Mediterranean imports (Bonifay and Bernal Casasola 2008, 99–115).

It appears that the domestic quarters were also planned, within regular blocks. While much of the city space has not been excavated yet, it appears quite densely built up, as indicated by geophysical surveys.³ The only domestic area so far excavated lies south of the palatial complex and the commercial buildings (Fig. 16.2: F1, F2, F3). These houses, which are 446 and 459 m² in size, include multi-functional rooms serving as living areas, kitchens and stores, which are distributed around an internal courtyard. Walls were made with rammed earth over a base of masonry and were lined with a lime mortar similar to that used in the palatial complex; the roofs were tiled. The presence in these buildings of North African amphorae and *spatheia*, ARSW D wares, wheel-thrown kitchen and table wares (see Checa-Herráiz, in press), glass (mostly table wares) and late Roman bronze coins, as well as one tremissis, identifies the occupants as members of the urban elite (Fig. 16.2: F1). The water supply for the residents depended on an aqueduct and diverse cisterns – a mixed system seen in other cities during this period, including Merida and Tarragona (Olmo Enciso 2008a, 54–55).

Recopolis was both a production and consumption centre, evident in the noted commercial and industrial area. There were two glass furnaces in operation, one of which remained active into the early Islamic period, the other until the mid-seventh century (Gómez de la Torre Verdejo 2011, 257–281). The discovery of a goldsmith's workshop, equipped with tools and featuring evidence for a variety of specific tasks – moulds, scales, scoria – also confirm the high-level artisanal nature of these spaces (Olmo-Enciso 2008a, 53). Ceramic production in Recopolis, characterised by the production of fast-wheel-thrown wares, was the most varied in the central Iberian Peninsula, and included both kitchen and table wares. Most of the pottery was locally produced, as confirmed by petrological analysis of the fabrics, which match the geological characteristics of local clays (Checa-Herráiz, in press). However, imports are represented by North African ARSW wares, Keay-type amphorae (61/62), *spatheia*, 'orlo a fascia' amphorae and Eastern 'UWW1 spouted jugs' (Bonifay and Bernal 2008, 99–115); these all reveal that the elites of Recopolis had access to wider Mediterranean goods; in fact, the seventh-century assemblage found here is the richest collection of



Figure 16.1 Aerial view of Recopolis (source: cnig.es – Centro Nacional de Información Geográfica, PNOA 2010, Spain)

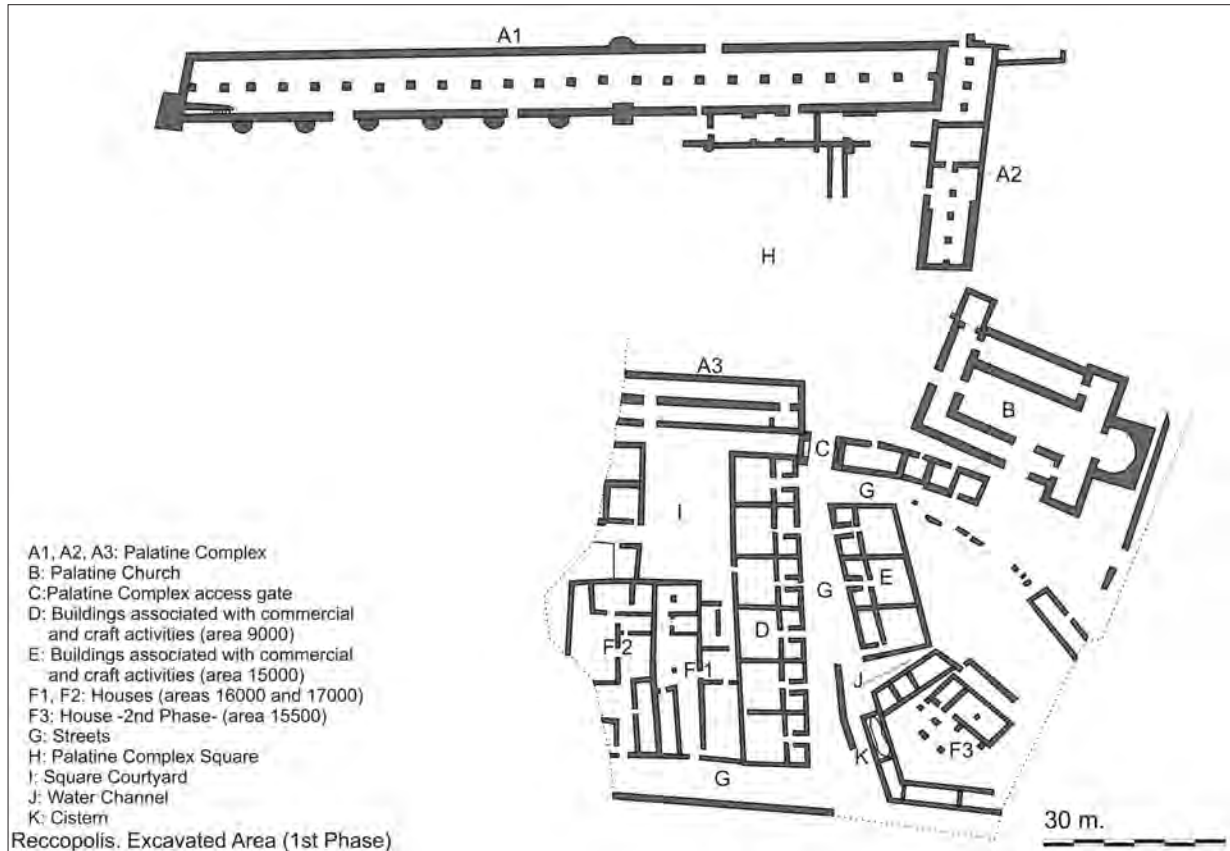


Figure 16.2 Recopolis: excavated area (source: L. Olmo-Enciso)

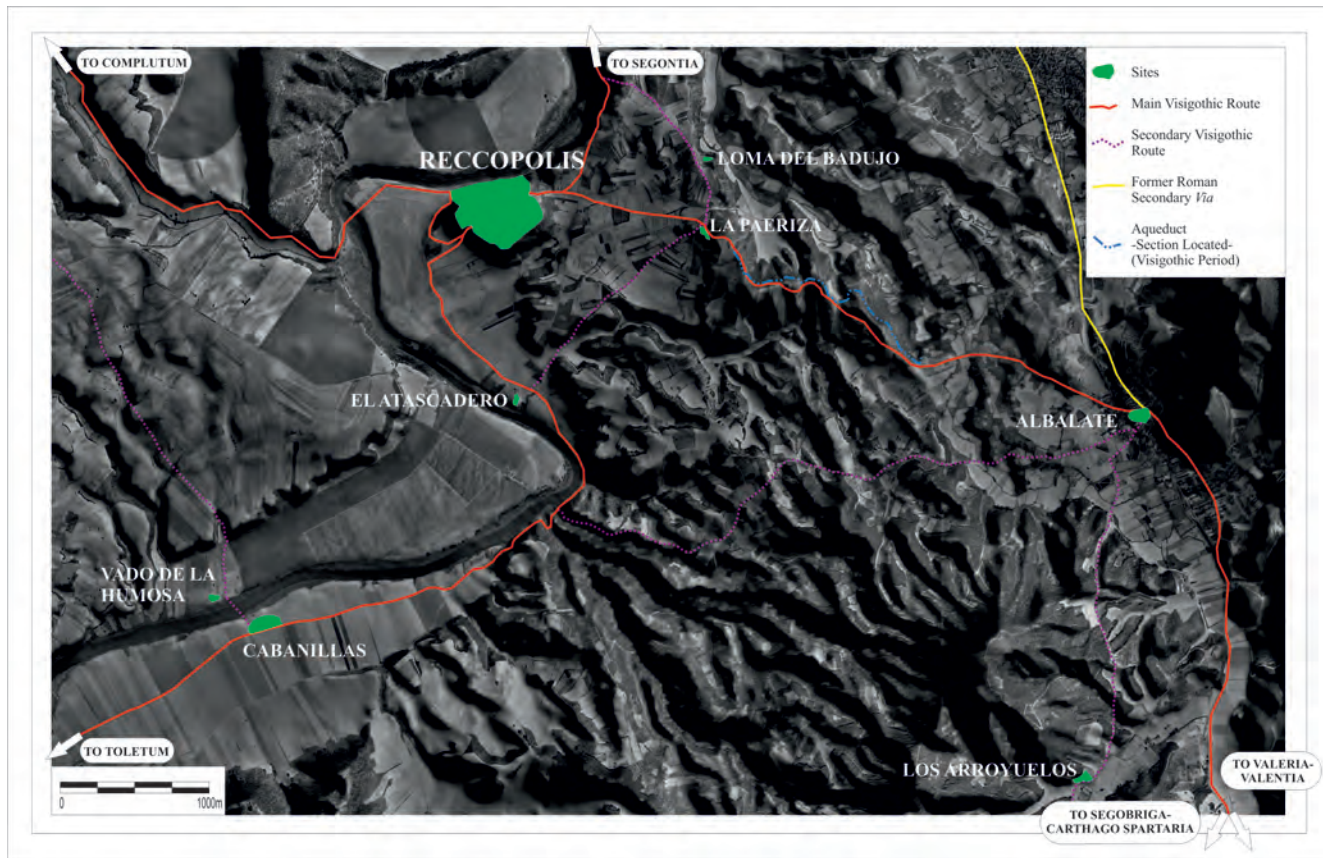


Figure 16.3 Recopolis in its territory: the rearrangement of the landscape (source: L. Olmo-Enciso)

Mediterranean imports in the centre of the Iberian Peninsula (Olmo-Enciso 2015, 33).

Hinterland

The foundation of Recopolis involved the emergence of a new remodelled landscape in the surrounding region, in a process attested elsewhere in the centre of the Iberian Peninsula. This rearrangement of the landscape was related to the construction of different infrastructures associated with the city – roads, aqueduct, quarries – and the creation of a supporting rural settlement pattern for a radius of 4 km (Fig. 16.3). The latter comprised diverse settlement forms, especially hamlets – Loma del Badujo, Los Arroyuelos, Cabanillas – and possibly including a farm – La Paeriza (at which the quality of construction is better than that of the hamlets, and finds include some imported materials, such as Keay 61 amphorae); investigation at all of these sites have yielded thrown pottery similar to types found in Recopolis. The sites all lay close to the major roads created in association with the city's construction, and these expanded radially with the city at the centre (a pattern seen in other early medieval European central places). Recopolis also became one of the central hubs in routeways linking the centre of the Iberian Peninsula and the east coast (Fig. 16.4).

The creation of Recopolis, of its infrastructural support and of a reorganised territory was a route to 'disciplining'

the landscape, understood as a social space, and formed a demonstration of political power via the control of resources and economic surplus. Urban planning, therefore, not only allows for the disciplining of the cityscape, but also of the rural areas, which presented the peasant population with the physical manifestation of the social order and the place held by the elites within it. In this regard, it is important to understand that the goal of the new spatial organisation was equally to ensure the cohesion of the elite (cf Paynter and McGuire 1991, 10). It is no coincidence that Recopolis combined political, administrative and fiscal functions, related to the presence of the mint and storage areas, all of which connected with the administration of economic surplus. The city carried out these functions, with varying intensity, throughout the Visigothic period and into the first century of Islamic domination (Olmo-Enciso 2011, 42–46, 49).

However, our excavations have documented a cessation of significant building activity around the mid-seventh century, and a process of urban disaggregation that was to become the characteristic feature of the second stage of Recopolis' history. The previous regularity of the urban layout was to some extent lost, and the workshops and shops were turned into domestic structures. The internal distribution of houses also suffered significant changes, and hitherto unoccupied space was taken over by new domestic structures. Construction techniques deteriorated

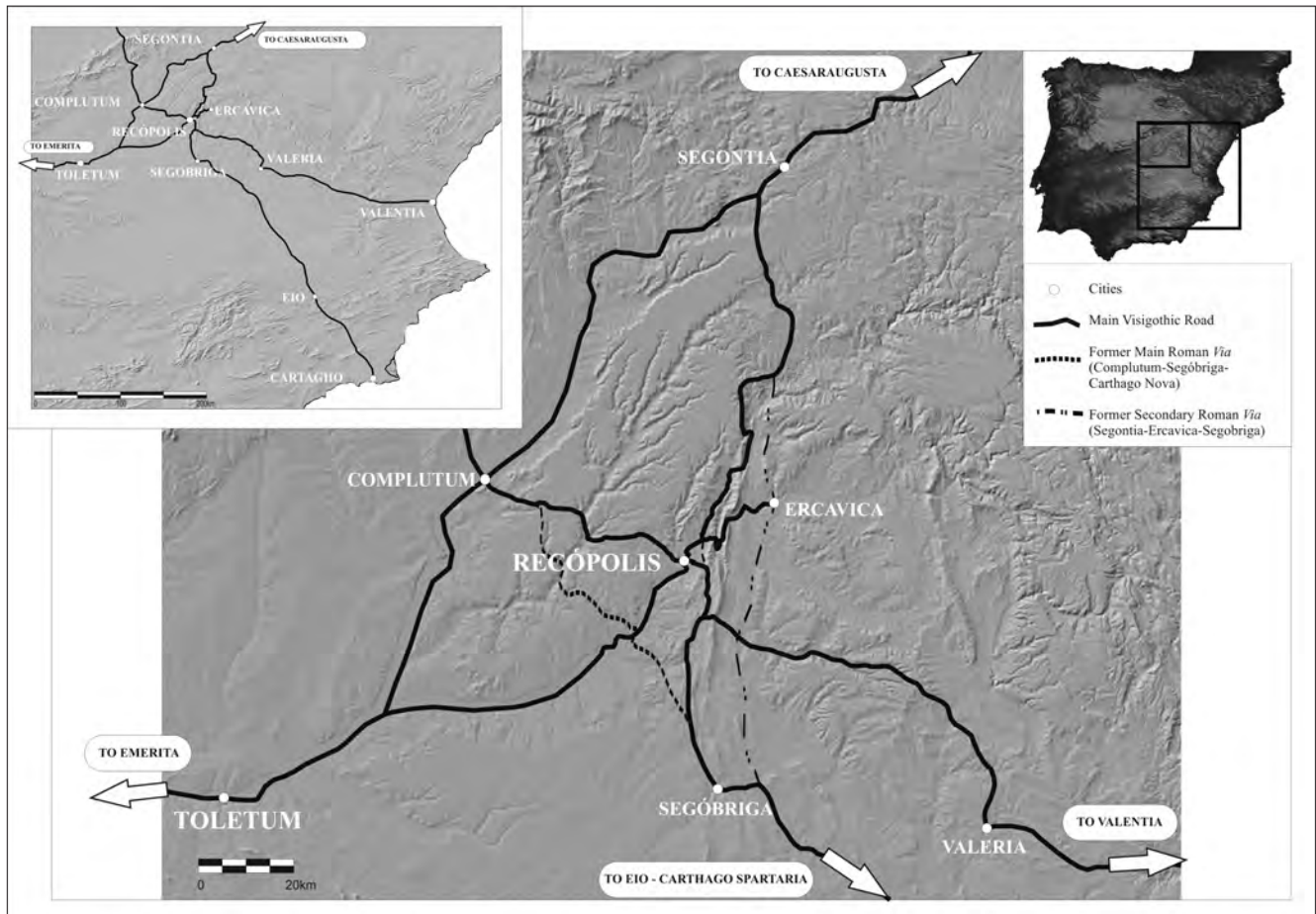


Figure 16.4 The reorganised road system around Recópolis (source: L. Olmo-Enciso)

and became less sophisticated, with lime mortar floors replaced by clay pavements in even the principal houses as well as in the southern palace building (Fig. 16.2: A3). The evidence shows ongoing activity, certainly, but one that was commercially and perhaps administratively less intense.

In this same period, the most important episcopal sees in the Peninsula, which had featured notable urban dynamism between the late sixth and mid-seventh centuries, underwent a similar process of decline. This was the result of the end of State- and Church-sponsored construction in the wealthier areas of urban nuclei, which is connected with crises in the Visigothic State which became particularly acute in the late seventh century, weakening also its ability to collect taxes (Olmo-Enciso 1998, 2007, 194–196, 2008a, 58–60, 2010, 106–107). Strikingly, by the early eighth century, the gold content of tremisses had fallen from 80% to under 30%, and the size of coins diminished proportionally, implying that the monetary system was in dire straits (Retamero 2000, 101; Castro Priego 2008, 139–140), damaging an already weak fiscal structure even further. Archaeological evidence suggests a more homogeneous landscape, and the few cities that had stood out from the typical urban pattern in the sixth century – characterised by polynuclear, unstructured sites – lost some of their previous idiosyncrasy; nonetheless, most

of these centres still played a central role in the articulation of their territories (Olmo Enciso 2011). This is the urban landscape in crisis that the Arabs encountered on assailing the Iberian Peninsula in AD 711.

Changing Agro-Ecosystems

This revised interpretation of the period in terms of changed society and settlement, based on the material data, prompts also fuller assessment of the environmental record, which can offer important insights into the natural and worked landscape as well as climatic conditions. Palaeoenvironmental and other evidence, outlined below, do in fact attest to changes in the plant population, in levels of anthropic pressure, in transforming economic structures and in the role played by climatic factors. Modifications to the social landscape, defined by altered settlement patterns and economic structures and changes to the organisation of the agro-ecosystem can be traced back to the mid fifth century. Climatologically, the period was dominated by dry Mediterranean conditions (Olmo Enciso *et al.*, in press). The climatic oscillations experienced during this period, defined as the ‘Early Medieval Cold Episode’ (AD 450–950), have been recently characterised in Northern Europe and, partially, in the Mediterranean, revealing that they are part of

climatic events operating at the hemispheric scale (Büntgen *et al.* 2011; McCormick *et al.* 2012; Delogu 2012; see also later discussion). In the specific landscape of Recopolis, the palaeoenvironmental analysis of archaeological contexts indicate that the city's hinterland was indeed affected by environmental processes attested elsewhere in the rest of the Iberian Peninsula. Between the sixth and eighth centuries, this landscape was characterised by extensive areas of open forest and an agriculture-based economic strategy (plus extensive stock-breeding), the adoption of which agro-ecosystem may have been connected to a need to adapt to more arid conditions than those that prevailed before (Olmo Enciso *et al.*, in press). The high values presented by the non-pollinic microfossil (NPM) *Glomus* c.f. *fasciculatum*, related to deforestation processes, is illustrative in this regard. Additional supporting evidence comes from the low values scored by bushy taxa; the presence of steppe taxa among the herbaceous species, among which grazing plants have been detected; and the presence of ruderal species in agricultural fields. The presence of olive trees (*Olea*) and, to a lesser extent, walnuts (*Juglans*) and hazel (*Corylus*), may relate to local economic activities carried out in specific locations in the city's immediate hinterland. The presence of arboreal taxa is below 40%, with the most representative taxa *Pinus* and *Juniperus*; *Olea* and *Quercus* also appear in significant numbers. This evidence shows how climatic change was faced by the creation of a new adjusted landscape, which in turn would have considerable impact on the social structure.

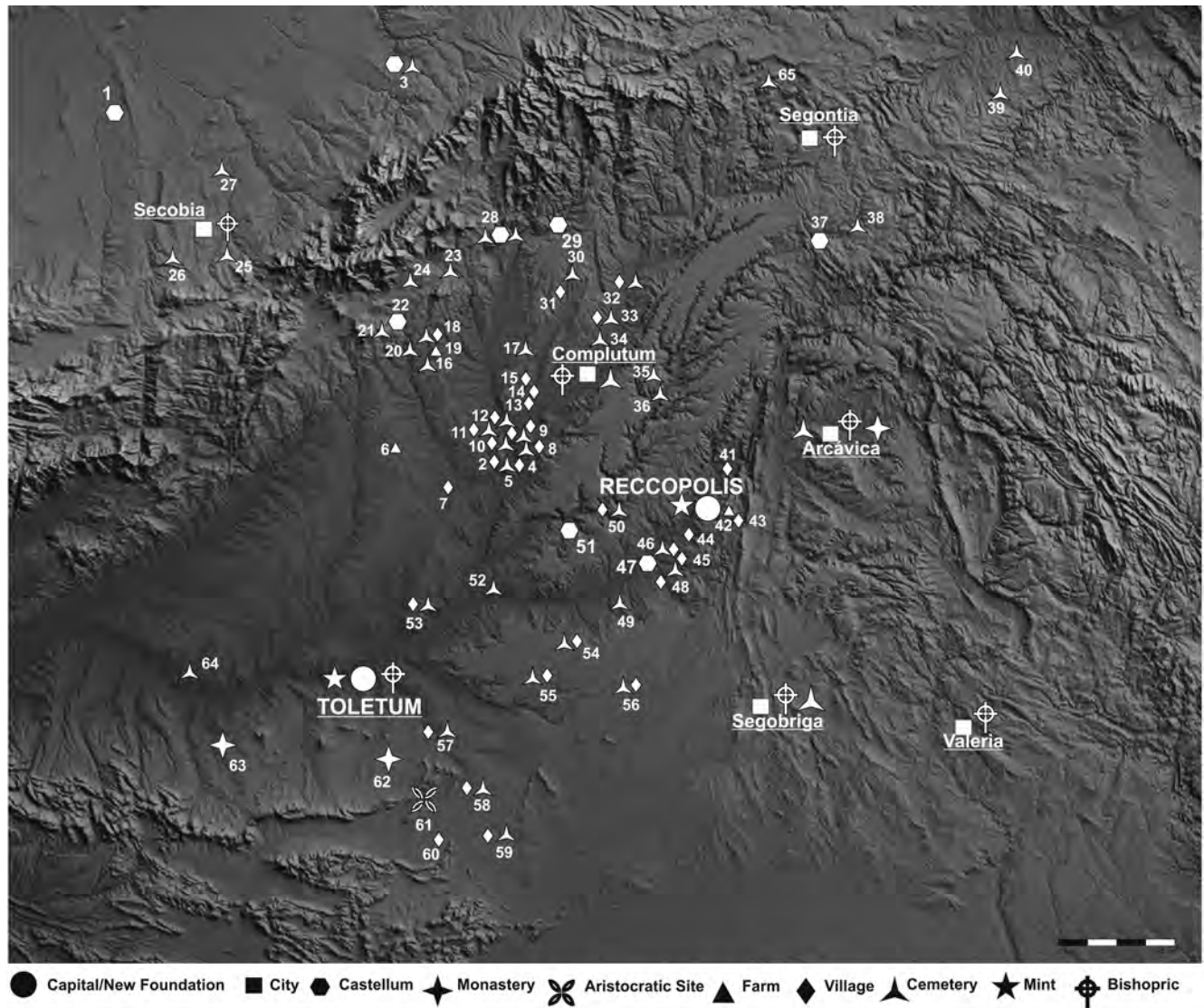
Unequal Landscapes at the Regional Level: Central Iberia

Our comments about Recopolis and its hinterland must be put into their regional context, namely the Tagus River basin (Fig. 16.5). Archaeological research carried out over the last two decades has revealed here a much modified or altered landscape, consolidated during the second half of the sixth century and characterised by a higher degree of variability than in the Peninsula's northern regions. In this regard, landscape dynamics in Central Iberia corresponded to those operating in western Mediterranean regions (Olmo-Enciso 2015, 16). Key to all this is better recognition of a core social group, one discussed by historians but long difficult to trace until recent times in the archaeology, namely the peasantry. The discovery of, for example, a substantial number of hamlets is crucial to illustrate changes in the rural landscape from the mid-fifth century onwards (see examples and discussions in Vigil-Escalera Guirado 2007; Quirós Castillo 2009, 2013). Analysis of these sites has generated an interpretive model based on the so-called peasant mode of production, in which peasant control of agrarian production is set at the foundations of the social structure and seen as a key factor in the formation of early medieval landscapes (Vigil-Escalera Guirado and Quirós

Castillo 2013, 376–377, 384, 386, 388). Although elites exist, their presence is not regarded as crucial, because they neither controlled the hamlets nor most of production, and they too have little archaeological visibility (Vigil-Escalera Guirado 2013, 266).

The proposal that locates peasants at the centre of the social framework is valuable, insofar as it places a necessary emphasis on peasantry as an historical subject, but its reductionist nature must be challenged: the material remains indicates that the social reality was much more complex than suggested by this perspective. Our central Iberian study region is an ideal case in point, especially because it has been used to argue for the prevalence of a peasant mode of production. The archaeological record shows that, from the second half of the sixth century onwards, the regional landscape becomes more multi-layered than previously, being now characterised by a system of unequal relations reflecting the stratified nature of the social structure (Olmo-Enciso 2015). This becomes manifest in the existence of a dense network of peasant settlements – hamlets and villages – plus intermediate and locally dominant settlements – hilltop settlements, ecclesiastical centres and aristocratic residences – and a hierarchy of cities, at the top of which were royal Visigothic Toledo and Recopolis. Elites are thus found in the rural context – farmhouses, necropoleis and even hamlets – in a variety of ways which highlight their privileged position and make them visible, including weapons, gold, silver and bronze prestige items, pateras, North African ceramics, glass, etc. (Olmo-Enciso 2015, 23–26). Similarly, landscape studies suggest economic diversification, for example with the presence of a mining area to the north of Madrid, which includes a series of hamlets and industrial structures related to processes from extracting to smelting iron (Colmenarejo García *et al.* 2014, 221–222, 225–226) (Fig. 16.5: 16, 19, 20, 21, 23). This sort of productive complex indicates the existence of centralised management systems and production surpluses, which, in turn, points towards the prevalence of vertical social relationships dominated by local elites (Olmo-Enciso 2015, 23), like those seemingly in operation in the northern regions, especially the Basque Country and Galicia (Azkarate Garai-Olaún and García Camino 2012, 341; Martínez Cortizas *et al.* 1997, 14–15; Sánchez Pardo 2014, 999–1006).

The visibility of elites is also evident in a series of hilltop settlements that acted as points of social control and surplus collection, as suggested by their architectural features (cf Olmo-Enciso 2015, 26–29) (Fig. 16.5: 23, 24, 30, 38, 39, 52). Ambiguously cited as *castra* or *castella*, these settlements echo a fifth-century European-wide phenomenon, and are interpreted as places of residence of the old rural elite and as the material projection of the power of the gentry and the State (see Francovich and Hodges 2003; Brogiolo and Chavarría Arnau 2005, 76, 82–85; Gelichi 2010, 68; Schneider 2010, 137). In central Iberia, these settlements



1. Bernardos 2. Tinto Juan de la Cruz 3. Duratón 4. Góñez de Arriba 5. La Indiana 6. La Vega 7. El Pelicano 8. El Jardinillo/Perales 9. Congosto 10. Acedinos 11. Fuente de la Mora 12. La Gavia 13. El Rasillo 14. La Huelga 15. Prado de los Galápagos 16. Fuente del Moro 17. Daganzo 18. Navalhija 19. Navalvillar 20. Los Remedios 21. El Rebollar 22. Cancho del Confesionario 23. La Cabrera 24. Venturada 25. Cárcava 26. Madrona 27. Espirido 28. El Berrueco 29. El Pontón de la Oliva 30. Cerro de las Losas 31. Talamanca 32. El Ruiseñor 33. Alovera 34. Azuqueca de Henares 35. Los Santos de la Humosa 36. Anchuelo 37. Gualda 38. Trillo 39. Corduente 40. Villet de Mesa 41. Sayatón 42. La Paeriza 43. Los Arroyuelos 44. Cabanillas 45. Haza Plana 46. Vega Alóciga 47. Cerro de la Muela 48. Algarga 49. Santa Cruz de la Zarza 50. Orusco 51. Carabaña 52. Cacara de las Ranas 53. Cabañas de la Sagra 54. Villarrubia de Santiago 55. Los Villares de Ocaña 56. Villatobas 57. Nambroca 58. Orgaz 59. Los Yébenes 60. Arisgotas 61. Los Hitos 62. San Pedro de la Mata 63. Melque 64. Carpio de Tajo 65. Palazuelos.

Figure 16.5 Early medieval sites in the central area of the Tagus River basin (from Olmo-Enciso 2015, 16)

will have become central to the political and fiscal structure and formed the seats where negotiations between local elites and the central political authorities took place. The role of these hilltop settlements in the organisation of the rural territory that surrounded them is clear: they were encircled by defensive walls and contained an extraordinary corpus of fiscal and legal inscriptions on schist/slate, as well as high quality regional ceramic productions (Castellanos and Martín Viso 2005; Martín Viso 2014, 152).

From the last third of the sixth century onwards, the urban landscape of the central sector of the basin of the River Tagus

presents the most diversified picture in the Iberian Peninsula. The two clearest manifestations of State-sponsored planned urbanism, Toledo and Recópolis, co-existed with a series of polynuclear urban centres which follow a pattern detected elsewhere in Western Europe during this period. This landscape is the result of the crisis of the Roman *civitas*, which becomes particularly obvious from the fifth century onwards, but whose first symptoms can be detected in some cities from as early as the third century (Diarte-Blasco 2015). This process is archaeologically documented in Complutum, Ercávica, Valeria and Segóbriga (Fig. 16.5):

except for Complutum, whose townscape largely endured unchanged until the fifth century, the others began a gradual process of transformation in the third century, involving the abandonment of civic spaces and their replacement by domestic areas and a more heterogeneous urban layout, characteristic of cities during Late Antiquity (Diarte-Blasco 2015, 293–296, 298, 307). By the sixth century, sites were polynuclear, featuring buildings variously constructed in masonry, timber, rammed earth and *spolia*. Christian foci are seen at Segóbriga, Complutum and Ercávica in the construction of suburban religious buildings; each site became, along with Valeria, episcopal sees, but none of these possessed a mint (Olmo-Enciso 2015, 30). Despite this process of dismantling of the classical townscape, all these sites retained their status as cities and central places during the Visigothic period, and their condition as episcopal sees served to organise a fragmented territory.

However, we must be alert to the fact that different scales were in operation as far as the articulation of the territory is concerned, as suggested by the case of Segóbriga. Segóbriga's late antique and early medieval urban structure was more sophisticated than the others, including well-defined religious spaces and civic areas decorated with an important sculptural programme (Cebrián, 2017, 107–122). Yet in none of these is the archaeological visibility of the elite pronounced, certainly not on the level of Toledo or Recopolis. As previously noted, the archaeological visibility of the aristocracies must also be contextualised and viewed within the framework presented by the landscape, which was in itself a reflection of the contemporary hierarchical social system (Olmo-Enciso 2015, 30). Between the second half of the sixth and the first half of the seventh century, the material expressions of the social hierarchy can be observed on the peninsular level, with the revitalisation of several cities reflecting the increased ability of the Visigothic State to collect taxes (Olmo-Enciso 1998, 2008a, 2010, 2015). This process of urban revitalisation crystallised in the construction of notable ecclesiastical buildings, chiefly in the episcopal sees – Barcelona, Tarragona, Valencia, Mérida, etc. – or State-sponsored civic structures and urban planning features, as at Recopolis and Toledo. The importance and pre-eminence of these urban centres responded to their role as receptors of economic surplus, as reflected in the establishment of mints (Olmo-Enciso 2008a, 58–60, 2010, 106). The resulting landscape in Hispania was, therefore, characterised by heterogeneity and the co-existence of different urban scales, pointing once more to the need to analyse the phenomenon from both a local and a regional perspective.

Within this context and in this central region of Iberia, we find the two most outstanding examples of State-sponsored urbanism in Visigothic Spain: the revitalisation of the capital, Toledo, and the *ex novo* foundation of Recopolis, as detailed above. In both cases, the cityscapes reflect a new political ideal – the expression of a well-defined ideology

through topography. In Toledo, the area of Vega Baja was developed from the second half of the sixth century, and the residual Roman structures obliterated: this large suburban sector (90 ha in size) quickly became densely built up and was divided into clearly demarcated and hierarchised spaces (Olmo-Enciso 2010), including the construction of a palatial complex, several major churches (all key complexes, with the exception of the cathedral, which lay in the former Roman city), houses, commercial and industrial quarters, and a regular street layout. The discovery, in the area of the possible palace, of items of commercial and industrial nature – weights, scales, imported African and Eastern goods, decorative items in ivory, glass-production remains – recalls the set-up in Recopolis and other Mediterranean cities (Olmo-Enciso 2010, 98–100).

Visigothic Recopolis and Toledo were economic and administrative centres and fiscal hubs, and hosted the only mints in the Peninsula's central region (in other regions, successful episcopal sees possessed mints) (Olmo-Enciso 2006, 252, 260–262, 2008a, 59–60, 2015, 29–31; Castro Priego 2014, 472). The initial success of the Visigothic State from the 570s is documented in the issuing of the first series of tremisses by King Leovigild, by an overall increase in the volume of tremisses in circulation as well as by the State monopoly in the production of coinage (Retamero 2000, 127; Olmo-Enciso 2015, 34–35; Castro-Priego 2016, 27–30). Without this economic vitality, the expansion of Toledo and the foundation of Recopolis would have been unimaginable. Indeed, these two centres are the most obvious material manifestations of the State and of one of its most significant roles, namely the collection of taxes (Olmo-Enciso 2015, 39–41).

Ongoing Thoughts

A key factor in the analytical process being undertaken is the consideration of the landscape as a social construction. In this regard, it is essential to leave behind once and for all the dualist paradigm which considers Nature and culture forming two separate spheres of reality, and replace it with epistemological constructions based on a more fluid biology-culture dialectic (cf Mrozowsky 2006, 24–25). This position, which is critical to historico-cultural approaches, is the result of a long archaeological tradition, which defends the need to study landscapes contextually (Bender 1993, 2, 1999, 31–45) as a dynamic social space where traditional scientific divisions have no room (Olmo-Enciso *et al.*, in press). In order to understand the complex landscape of the central Iberian Peninsula, it is vital to embrace also the palaeoenvironmental and climatic evidence; this may result in interpretations that, as pointed out by Francovich (2007, 150), can re-write chapters of history that might seem closed.

It must be recognised that, although subsumed in the general environmental dynamics of the Peninsula, this

central region comprises diverse micro-regions separated by mountainous areas, river basins, etc. which reacted differently to general trends. Although data for our region are incomplete, there are sufficient to establish the initial core environmental characteristics here. Most data come from natural sedimentary deposits dated by calibrated radiocarbon dates; these suggest a process of changes in the agro-ecosystem, most notably in the sixth and seventh centuries – deforestation, formation of pastures, new crop and grazing areas, etc. – with the organisation of new productive landscapes, in a climatic context dominated by dry Mediterranean conditions (Gil García *et al.* 1993; Riera-Mora 2006, 19–26; 2008, 22, 29–37; Currás *et al.* 2012, 49; Blanco González *et al.* 2014, 2–6; Olmo-Enciso *et al.*, in press).

An ongoing challenge is understanding the relationship between human settlements and the agro-ecosystem that emerged from these transformations, as well as the social responses to the wide-ranging climatic crisis (the noted ‘Early Medieval Cold Episode’). The palaeoenvironmental record confirms the emergence of an economic system based on stock-breeding and agriculture; deforestation was followed by the creation of wide pasturage or grazing areas. Cereals seem to have predominated in the area immediately surrounding the hamlets that emerged – wheat, barley and oats – alongside ongoing cultivation of olives and vines. Concerning animals, the domestic record in these hamlets is dominated by sheep and goats (24%–48%), to a lesser extent, cattle (20%), few pigs and a fairly substantial number of horses (15%) in the sites of Gózquez and La Huelga (López Sáez 2003, 28–36, 2004, 169–176; Vigil-Escalera Guirado *et al.* 2013). One key problem is the lack of evidence concerning the morphology of productive spaces, although, in some hamlets, agricultural land is seen to alternate with domestic structures (Vigil-Escalera Guirado and Quirós Castillo 2013, 382) which could be related to peasant subsistence practices (Olmo-Enciso *et al.*, in press). In any case, the paucity of information available concerning the organisation and morphology of the agro-ecosystem prevents any conclusions being drawn about the social characteristics of peasant work and their relationship with the property regime. This picture, however, needs to be considered in the context of the general changes begun in the mid-fifth century; also, the consistency, density and scale of the evidence reveal how these changes were the result of social and economic responses to the building climatic crisis. Given the wide geographical area in which these changes can be detected, it would seem that the changes in the worked landscape were carried out by local peasant communities under the control of the elites – a phenomenon that can also be attested elsewhere in Iberia.

The evidence for the impact of cities on their immediate environment adds another factor of diversity at the micro-regional level. The hinterland of Recopolis, for instance, underwent a process of severe anthropisation alongside but

especially following the city’s foundation. The scale of the operation can hardly be doubted: deforestation, creation of new rural settlements, a new road network and the wholesale re-organisation of the productive landscape, based on stock-breeding and agriculture and including the introduction of new agricultural practices (Olmo-Enciso *et al.* in press). Such hinterlands, therefore, present similar characteristics to those in rural areas: open spaces, stock-breeding and agricultural practices. In terms of fauna, the record at Recopolis attests to the predominance of sheep and goats (c. 50%), and a lesser presence of cattle (6%) and horses (under 2%) than in rural contexts; pigs represent less than 2%, whereas the presence of wild species is more significant (nearly 6%, *Capra pyrenaica*, *Capreolus capreolus* and *Cervus elaphus*) (Olmo-Enciso *et al.*, in press).

The process of social transformation that led to the consolidation of the social landscape, as well as the emergence and development of the Visigothic State, coincided with a remarkably arid cycle that ran from the late sixth to the eighth century; this cycle was part of the hemispheric-scale climatic episode known as the Early Medieval Cold Episode (Büntgen *et al.* 2011; McCormick *et al.* 2012; Delogu 2012). This began with a cold phase from the mid-fifth to the mid-sixth centuries, followed by a warmer phase between c. AD 650 and 750. For the Iberian Peninsula, our data are regionally uneven, but seemingly indicate that it followed the overall climatic trends prevailing in Western Europe and the Mediterranean. Natural – pollen, speleothemes, peat bogs – and anthropic data – collected in Recopolis and peasant hamlets – confirm the emergence of a steppe-like landscape. The dry conditions also caused water levels in lakes to decrease substantially – some of these lakes even turned into wetlands (Gil *et al.* 2007; Martín-Chivelet *et al.* 2011; Moreno *et al.* 2012; Currás *et al.* 2012, 49; Olmo-Enciso *et al.*, in press). A parallel phenomenon is attested in European and African lakes in the first half of the sixth century – a phenomenon also associated with the consequences of volcanic eruptions: see Büntgen *et al.* 2011, 580).

Such evidence prompts us to reassess the written evidence, which document a series of events that can be related to these climatic conditions, such as intense droughts, bad harvests, famine, plagues of *Yersinia pestis* and swarms of locusts – the latter endemic and especially active in this region of the centre–south of the Peninsula. All these circumstances converged in the years 540–545, 577–590, 630–641 and 694–709, and were especially severe from the last quarter of the sixth century onwards (sources include the *Chronica Caesaraugustana*, a.a. 542; *Vitas Patrum Emeritensium* V, 2.3, 11.21, 14.2; Greg. Tur., *Historia Francorum* VI.33, IX.22; Braulio, *Epistola*, 3; *Vita Sancti Audoini* 7; *Lex Visigothorum* II.1.12; *Concilium Toletanum* XIV.3; *Continuatio Hispana*, 34; *Ajbar Machmûa*). Alongside this agrarian crisis, the texts attest to situations

of extreme poverty and inequality, with peasants badly hit (cf Braulio, *Vita Sancti Aemiliani* XX.27). Everything suggests that these critical events sent the agrosystem into disarray, and, as has been attested elsewhere, upset food production and distribution systems (Büntgen *et al.* 2011, 580). In this regard, it is worth noting that the State was forced to adapt the judicial holidays to a new cereal harvest calendar, which had to occur earlier in the year to avoid the endemic swarms of locusts (*Lex Visigothorum* II, 1, 12; Barceló 1978, 70). Such evidence is illustrative of the gravity of the agrarian crisis, which even forced the state to coordinate economic activity.

Furthermore, the sources bear witness to elites being directly involved in the management and organisation of the rural economy. In the north of the Iberian Peninsula (Galicia and the Basque Country), for instance, widespread terracing appears to have been established (Ballesteros Arias *et al.* 2006, 214; Varón-Hernández *et al.* 2012, 301), resulting in a substantial increase of land under cultivation and the organisation of a different agrarian system (Ballesteros Arias 2010, 37–38). Arguably, in these regions, terraces were the response to climate-driven deforestation and accelerated soil erosion (Martínez-Cortizas *et al.* 2005).

All this archaeological evidence points to a surplus-based social and economic system; surplus was collected and managed at different levels by a hierarchy of elite groups. I have already raised a number of questions concerning the circumstances and mechanisms that underlie the emergence of this system (Olmo-Enciso 2015, 40–41). Based on the evidence collected at Recopolis and its hinterland, we may ask the following: since the construction of such large-scale urban projects like Recopolis and Toledo required enormous resources, how was this kind of surplus generated and how was it collected? In what form was it processed and then sold/re-distributed? What manpower could the State itself call on in building in Recopolis complex and its wider infrastructure and in working the lands? How was this manpower articulated? Do the hamlets around Recopolis relate to dependent peasant communities? How can we map the areas of influence and direct control of royalty and elites at both Recopolis and Toledo (which must have covered the best part of the central region of the Peninsula)?

However, the evidence for a concentration of surplus can also be found in other urban and rural centres. This leads to new questions: how were the resources raised to fund construction in other, less active, cities, in the centre of the Peninsula, among which Segóbriga is a clear example? From where did the resources needed to found walled hilltop settlements, some of which present clear evidence of internal hierarchisation, come? The question may be extended to other rural settlements. Seen in context, the Visigothic landscapes seem to become more complex and increasingly hierarchised as the evidence-base grows. The questions must also take into consideration the changing scenarios of the

second half of the seventh century, with the beginning of a crisis phase of the Visigothic State, caused by the weakening of its fiscal structure. How did these developments affect the landscape? Arguably this sees stagnation in even the most dynamic cities, and the subsequent homogenisation of urban landscapes in the Peninsula. Rural landscapes and settlement patterns remained pretty much the same as they had been in the previous period; hilltop settlements also appear to survive the crisis, although there is an urgent need for better stratigraphies and chronologies to chart these.

One characteristic of this period, at any rate, is the increasing investment of elites in rural spaces (Olmo-Enciso 1998, 116, 2007, 193, 2015, 36–38). During this period there is a clear diversification of rural settlements, with the emergence of numerous elite-related places in the countryside. The seventh century, for instance, witnesses a substantial increase in the construction of rural churches and monasteries, which played a key role in the definition of the new geography of power and indicate the growing authority of aristocracies and ecclesiastical institutions, often in competition with one another (Chavarría Arnau 2010, 7–12). That is, the elites increase their pressure on the rural contexts by multiplying their control mechanisms. Christianisation played an axial role in the process of subjection and integration of the peasantry in the ideological and social order defended by the elites. In this regard, the written record is also explicit: sixth- and seventh-century sources are full of references to this issue, for example Martin of Braga's '*De correctione rusticorum*', Valerio of Bierzo, and the chapters of Church Councils, which repeatedly denounce pagan rituals in the countryside and the persistence of forms of worship to natural spirits (Olmo-Enciso 2015, 38).

The arguments presented above, from textual to archaeological and palaeoenvironmental, illustrate that Visigothic landscapes were more complex than previously believed and based around a stratified society in which the vertical relationships between elites and peasants operated on different scales. This socio-political and economic structure had to respond to the effects of a weaker central control, less wealth, plus unfavourable climatic conditions, leading to the formation of a diverse landscape system, settlement pattern and economic structure. The landscapes of Iberia between the second half of the sixth century and the early eighth century reflected the prevailing form of social stratification: space was organised on the basis of unequal, but interrelated, social relations and lifestyles (*ibid.*, 41–42). Most of the population were peasants, who also had to generate economic surplus under the coercion of the State and elites, despite unfavourable environmental conditions marked by droughts, bad harvests and plague, leading to drastic inequality. The elites, for their part, managed to stand out from the majority of the population in diverse ways, something for which multiple parallels may be found

elsewhere in the European West and the Mediterranean. The forms of control imposed by the State and the elites were made possible by the ability to collect this surplus via implementation of different coercive mechanisms that operated at different scales and degrees of intensity. This is reflected in the archaeological record, which must be analysed holistically. The comprehension of this complex reality and social and geographical landscape can only follow the application of a different approach which integrates all possible forms of evidence – archaeological (structural, material, funerary), philological, palaeoenvironmental – to finally leave behind traditional and outmoded paradigms and categorisations.

Notes

- 1 This work was carried out within the framework of Project ‘Construcción del Paisaje Medieval: Agrosistemas y Cambio Climático (HAR2013 44270-P’, Plan Estatal de Investigación Científica y Técnica, Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad del Gobierno de España. The excavations of Reccopolis are funded by the Consejería de Educación y Cultura, Junta de Comunidades de Castilla-La Mancha.
- 2 ‘With tyrants destroyed on all sides and the invaders of Spain overcome, King Leovigild had peace to reside with his own people. He founded a city in Celtiberia, which he named Recopolis after his son. He endowed it with splendid buildings, both within the walls and in the suburbs, and he established privileges for the people of the new city’ (English translation in Wolf 1990, 71).
- 3 The city, of which so far only 8% of its total area (21.5 ha) has been excavated, is being surveyed by geomagnetism and vibracoring sounding. This project is led by the universities of Harvard, Frankfurt and Alcalá, under the direction of M. McCormick, J. Henning and L. Olmo-Enciso. Publication of the survey is in preparation.

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Discontinuities, Threads of Continuity, Academic Inertia and All That: Debating the Late Antique and Early Medieval Archaeologies of Inner Iberia

Alfonso Vigil-Escalera Guirado

Introduction

An impressive and significant amount of archaeological data has been gathered and interpreted over the last 25 years concerning the Late Roman and early medieval periods in inner Spain. The consequent growth, development and questioning of this material and its implications and deficiencies have seen the generation in recent years especially of several valuable works of synthesis (*e.g.* Ariño 2013; Quirós Castillo 2009b, 2014; Diarte-Blasco 2016). New approaches and lines of research have considerably broadened the fields of study and turned upside down rooted mindsets and archaeological practices; among these positives I can highlight extensive excavations and increasing attention given to palaeoenvironmental materials and issues. This means that – finally – no longer do classical cities, monumental *villae* and exotic antiquities dominate, but much fuller weight is placed on working or agrarian landscapes and related peasant rural settlements. This process has been described as an ‘archaeological turn’ for the study on the early medieval peasantry (Escalona 2009). When considering the north-west quadrant of Iberia in a broad sense, much credit goes to the research projects led by Juan A. Quirós Castillo at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), who has succeeded in bringing academic and commercial archaeologists together and to make rescue projects also research ones (Quirós Castillo 2009a and 2013). In the meantime, medieval historians and archaeologists have engaged in fruitful debates on the basis of (normally) friendly dialogue and cross-fertilisation between written sources and material records (*e.g.* Castellanos and Martín Viso 2005; Díaz and Martín Viso 2011; Martín Viso 2009, 2016).

However, there are still some limitations, deficiencies and gaps which hinder an adequate understanding of the

repercussions of and responses to the disappearance of the Roman imperial structure in these regions of Hispania and the transition to new political powers and social orders. In addition, I will argue below that academic inertia may be another obstacle to furthering progress in the knowledge of this critical period.¹

When addressing the archaeological features that best characterise both the last century of imperial rule in Hispania and the subsequent post-imperial period, the most striking *discontinuities* we can identify can be summarised in terms of four issues: burial practices, settlement patterns, storage systems and domestic architectures. All of these, plus the theme of hoards, merit brief reflection below, before I review the evidence for the threads of *continuity*, in the sense used by Brumfiel (2007).

My geographic focus is inner Iberia. This is a huge region that includes the northern and southern plateau, divided by the Central System. It is bounded by mountains to the north, east and south and crossed by the Duero, Tajo and Guadiana rivers; these rivers all flow westward towards the Atlantic, but none is suitable for navigation from the sea. All this territory remains, therefore, mostly disconnected from the Mediterranean and Atlantic trading routes. Stand-out projects of recent decades have been the extensive excavations undertaken at the village of Zaballa, near Vitoria (Quirós Castillo 2012), those concerning rural settlements near Madrid (Vigil-Escalera 2007) or those at the cities of El Tolmo de Minateda (Albacete) or Recopolis (Zorita de los Canes, Guadalajara) (Gutiérrez Lloret and Sarabia 2013; Olmo Enciso 2008).

Discontinuity in Burial Practices

A detailed analysis of the cemeteries previously known as ‘necropolis del Duero’ which have a geographical spread

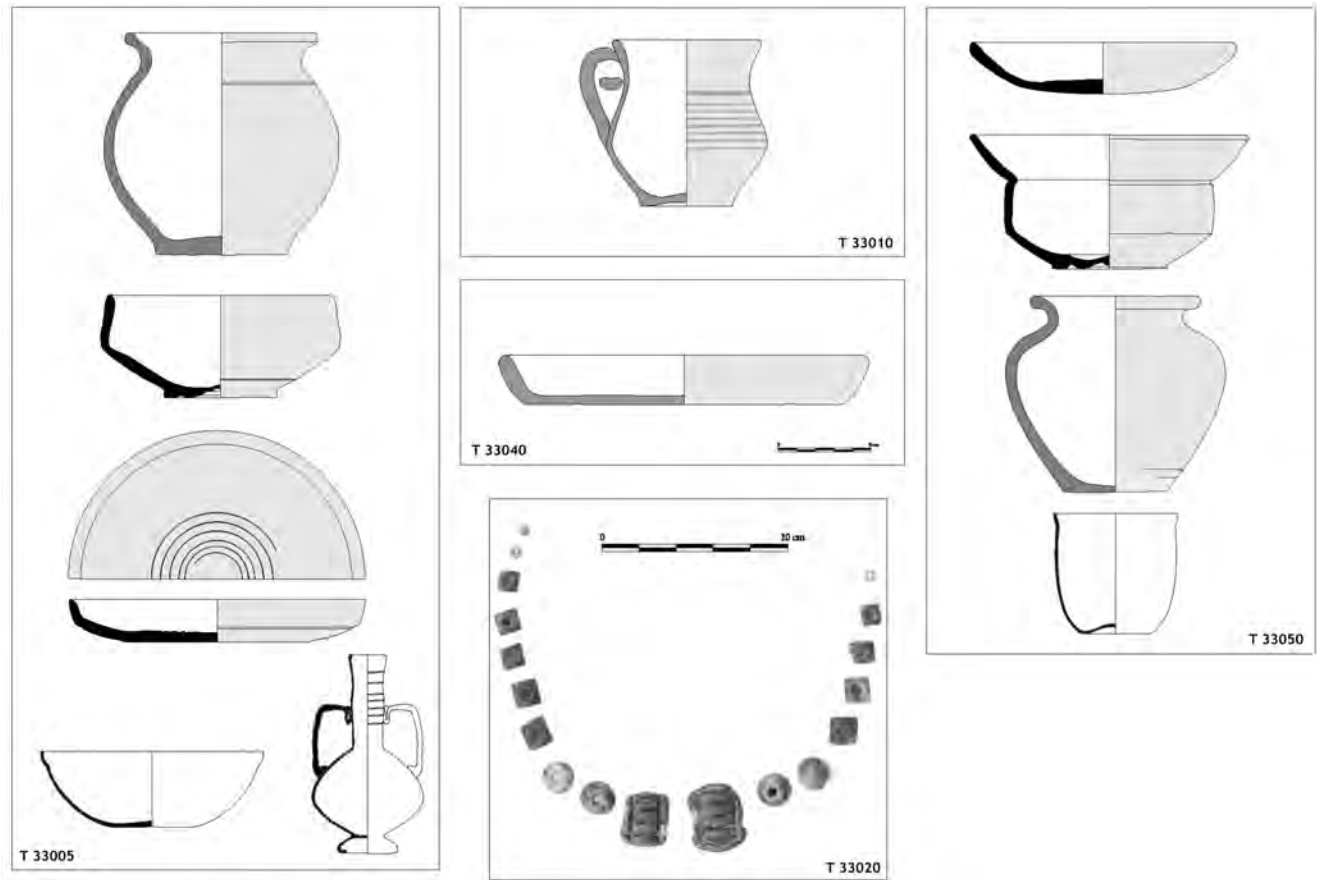


Figure 17.1 A collection of standard grave goods from a small post-imperial/Roman cemetery at El Soto, near Madrid: pottery and glass vessels and personal ornaments (image: author)

from the northern Cantabrian fringe to Sierra Morena (Fuentes 1989; Vigil-Escalera 2015) suggests that burial practices manifest the new agencies which emerged after a structural socio-political change occurred in the early fifth century. The standard type of grave was an individual burial in a wooden coffin, which usually included one or more glass and pottery vessels and elements of personal adornment (e.g. necklace beads, rings, bracelets, hobnailed shoes) (Fig. 17.1). Sporadically clay lamps, coins, belt buckles, a ‘Simancas-type’ knife, an iron spearhead, domestic tools or agricultural implements, bronze vessels or horse furniture may appear (Fig. 17.2). A few examples exceptionally include a long sword and feature silver or gold equivalents of the bronze items. Many small- to medium-size cemeteries of this type appear to be associated with single farms and villages; some very large ones (up to 500–600 burials in total) may be related to clusters of neighbouring settlements (e.g. at La Olmeda, Palencia) (Abásolo *et al.* 1997); while the rest belong to hillforts/hilltop settlements. In the latter cases, the burial grounds frequently lie just outside the walled circuit, although in very extensive sites the cemetery might also be located inside the wall (as at Dehesa de la Oliva, Madrid) (Vigil-Escalera 2012). The absence of any



Figure 17.2 A Simancas-type knife and belt buckle, deposited next to the body in a grave from the fortified site of Dehesa de la Oliva (Madrid) (image: author)

identifiable traces of associated churches should be noted; potentially timber chapels might be present but such have not been recognised by archaeology so far. Furthermore, one should observe that graves of this described type only rarely appear linked to urban centres.

Votive offerings and the display of wealth or rank, sometimes including *militaria*, are presumed to mark the respective position of individuals and families in broad and somewhat stressed societal contexts. Social competition entails giving high importance to public display at funerals. When buried together, free-individuals residing in a stable location assert themselves as belonging to a recognisable community and claim their rights over a portion of territory. Many levels of wealth and prestige are involved in these funerary practices, from the lower to the higher ones. However, the lower echelons of the social pyramid are almost always missing, or are removed from the rest of the community (Williams 2006; Vigil-Escalera 2013b). On the other hand, it would not be expected to find extremely wealthy individuals on a modest single-family farm, nor in a village. These absences are more difficult to explain in other types of settlements, such as defended hilltop sites.

Taken as a whole, such burial practices would not seem to be compatible or conceivable in the late Roman coordinates of rural landscapes, and do not make much sense alongside the prominent display of wealth and power by the great landowners who owned the *villae*. The funerary behaviour of these communities is perhaps easier to understand when the cemeteries are associated with the noted hilltop settlements; yet it should be emphasised that the funeral discourses are practically the same in both types of sites, whether hillforts or open settlements on the plain.

There is sufficient evidence to place the origin of 'post-imperial' cemeteries early in the fifth century AD. But they last for only two or three generations and cease before the end of that century. Cemeteries dated to the sixth century AD can be assigned to two different categories: the first ('Visigothic-type' necropoleis) show distinctive features, the second (cemeteries of 'Hispano-Roman' tradition) offer instead quite indefinite traits. The practice of depositing pottery or glass wares in the tomb almost disappears completely, and the same happens with military equipment. The specific feature of the Visigothic-type necropoleis are dressed burials with certain types of brooches, belt buckles and ornaments; overall, women display the greatest ceremonial showiness. The differences between cemeteries fade during the seventh century, with females no longer recognisable through dress and fittings, and deposition of grave-goods fades or stops completely.

However, a different situation prevails on the southern slopes of the western Pyrenees throughout this period: the deposition of weapons and grave-goods seems to be maintained until the early eighth century (Azkarate and García Camino 2013). It is worth noting that the post-imperial cemeteries and those immediately following almost never coincide in the same location; a quite exceptional case is represented by the El Pelicano (Arroyomolinos, Madrid) burial ground, in use from the early fifth century until the mid-eighth century without any relocation (Vigil-Escalera 2015, 256–264).

Discontinuity in Settlement Patterns

The occupation of fortified hilltop sites may be understood as another archaeological indicator signalling an altered political situation. Careful reading of the available archaeological evidence reveals that there are no such sites of this kind active during the second half of the fourth century in the inner and north-western regions of Hispania, but they do become fairly common elements of the landscape during the fifth century (even if related excavations remain few). Only in certain well-studied areas and with some doses of luck, can we directly relate the abandonment of nearby *villae* to the occupation of these hilltop settlements (Tejerizo *et al.* 2015).

The size of these hilltop sites widely vary from one hectare to more than 20. While some may have played the role of a small town, others could sparingly hold a dozen households within their defensive walls. Apart from the fortification features (ranging from a simple or nominal wall girding the summit to a turreted enclosure) of this heterogeneous category of sites, we remain ignorant of many of their main characteristics, notably their interior arrangements, whether they held any prestigious architectural units or public/shared facilities, and what kinds of activities took place in them. For instance, how self-sufficient were these places? Was there some internal hierarchy of house plots? The investigations carried out at El Castillon (Santa Eulalia de Tábara, Zamora) and Dehesa de la Oliva (Patones, Madrid) have at least revealed some notable differences in the domestic architecture with respect to that of the open settlements of the plains (Fuentes Melgar *et al.* 2015). Certainly the lack of research projects focused on any of these sites constitutes a major obstacle to further understanding of formats and functions.

Social unrest, political instability and a stringent need to defend lives and properties while maintaining some form of social order probably prompted the decision to occupy these (not always) hospitable sites, being uneven in terrain, arduous to reach and often quite distant from agricultural plots. It should not be ruled out that life in these sites was ordered in a manner not too far removed from life in the previous *villae*, in terms of maintaining strict centralised management of social routines and economic activities. It is symptomatic that hilltop settlements often reveal short occupational sequences, usually ranging from the fifth to the sixth century (see Tejerizo and Vigil-Escalera 2017), and being abandoned shortly afterwards. This quitting of hilltops is likely to have happened when wider political and economic stability was restored by the Visigothic Kingdom in the later sixth century.

A quick glance at the wide geographical distribution of these sites would suffice to discard (or relativise at least) the historiographical cliché that used to link them to different political frontiers (i.e. those of the Byzantines, Visigoths and Suevi). These sites have often been associated with

the strategic control over communication routes as well – including old Roman roads, cattle trails, transhumant routes, riverways, bridges, fords and mountain passes – and it is undeniable that most do have a nearby road, trail, etc. The strategic fallacy (*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*) has much in common with that of the frontiers. It is more likely that the real strategic resources to shelter in these fifth- and sixth-century hillforts/hilltop settlements were basically the workforce and food, i.e. people, livestock and grain.

Discontinuity in Storage Systems

Especially from the mid-fifth century AD, silos (= pits for the subterranean storage and conservation of crops, whether grain, fruit, etc.) become perhaps the most visible feature (archaeologically) of rural settlements, from the Cantabrian northern fringe to the south of the River Tajo (Vigil-Escalera and Quirós 2013). Just one example is Congosto (Rivas, Madrid), where 75 silos were identified, ranging in size, depth and capacity between 200 and 4800 litres, associated with perhaps three houses of late fifth- to mid-seventh-century date (Quirós Castillo 2013, 254). Estimates based on the number of dwellings and their length of occupation suggest that each household would have used at least six silos over each generation. This system of silos – normally multiple per property – matches the storage needs of individual households and seems to have replaced the centralised management of crop reserves in *horrea* previously supervised by the *villa* owner or his estate manager (Fig. 17.3). The ubiquitous presence of silos implies that, even if land ownership could remain in the same (elite) hands, peasant households were able to manage more their own economic livelihoods for their own survival (cf Wickham 2005, 537; Bianchi and Quirós 2013).

This is a crucial and very distinctive facet of these new, post-classical rural communities in Iberia; the silos give insights into households, economic strategies and lifeways that are otherwise often difficult to assess from the limited material remains of houses, rubbish and possessions alone.

Discontinuity in Domestic Architecture

Current archaeological evidence attests that elite investment in the countryside almost disappeared from the first half of the fifth century in this region. The means, skills and capacities of ‘ordinary’ or peasant household units prevail in all the domestic architectural features (Tejerizo 2013). We lack any substantial data on what was happening meanwhile in the cities, but rural settlements so far have yielded no sign of specialised workshops. Excavations reveal that farms and villages consist of juxtaposed household plots (see Vigil-Escalera 2007): each usually has a main dwelling building with drystone footing, walls made of mud bricks or rammed earth (*tapial*) and tiled roof; besides the silos, other, smaller

structures are arranged in the immediate surroundings, most of which are sunken-featured buildings with supporting posts, walls of wattle and daub and thatched roofs. The function of this structure type as storage premises, domestic workshops or processing-food installations, or even as temporary dwellings for slaves or dependents has been much debated (e.g. Tipper 2004; Tejerizo 2014). It is striking that all these rustic elements are missing in the landscapes of the *villae* during the last century of the Western Roman Empire in Hispania.

Hoardings

Hoardings are very distinctive archaeological deposits, normally with an unreachable biography. Too often simplistically related to critical events (e.g. barbarian invasions) or periods of insecurity (e.g. civil war), it is better recognised now that the concealment of valuable objects can occur contingently at any time and place, and can relate equally to economic strategies, storage processes and even ritual activity; and while a good number of hoardings known, we cannot know how many of them were originally buried, and how many were reclaimed (Reece 1988; Bland 2014, 11). And not all hoardings are necessarily ones with ‘valuable’ (i.e. monetary and high metal) contents.

Two different categories of hoardings can be recognised in the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of our own study: those consisting essentially of coins and those with domestic items, including pottery and glassware, bronze vessels, iron objects, and even perishable materials that leave no strong archaeological traces. Many of the iron objects are broken tools or else scrap waiting to be recycled (e.g. Naylor 2015, 134).

It is likely that most of the hoardings were buried expecting a later recovery (Curta and Gandila 2012, 45). The preferred location for what we can term as domestic hoardings seems to be in storage pits under the floor of the dwelling house. Further afield, some coin hoardings were instead concealed in caves, far from the points of residence. A comprehensive analysis of these contexts may suggest that they were not restricted to any single event and possibly reflected the impact of various local contingencies (Vigil-Escalera 2015b). It must be stressed that most, if not all, of the hoardings in the latest period of Roman Spain can be dated to the first half of the fifth century.

Threads of Continuity

Having outlined some of the more significant and intriguing discontinuities in the archaeological records of the post-imperial/classical and early medieval periods, we can now review other elements that point instead to some modes of continuity from earlier, imperial times.

Firstly, I would argue that pottery remains a fairly conservative element in the archaeological record of these

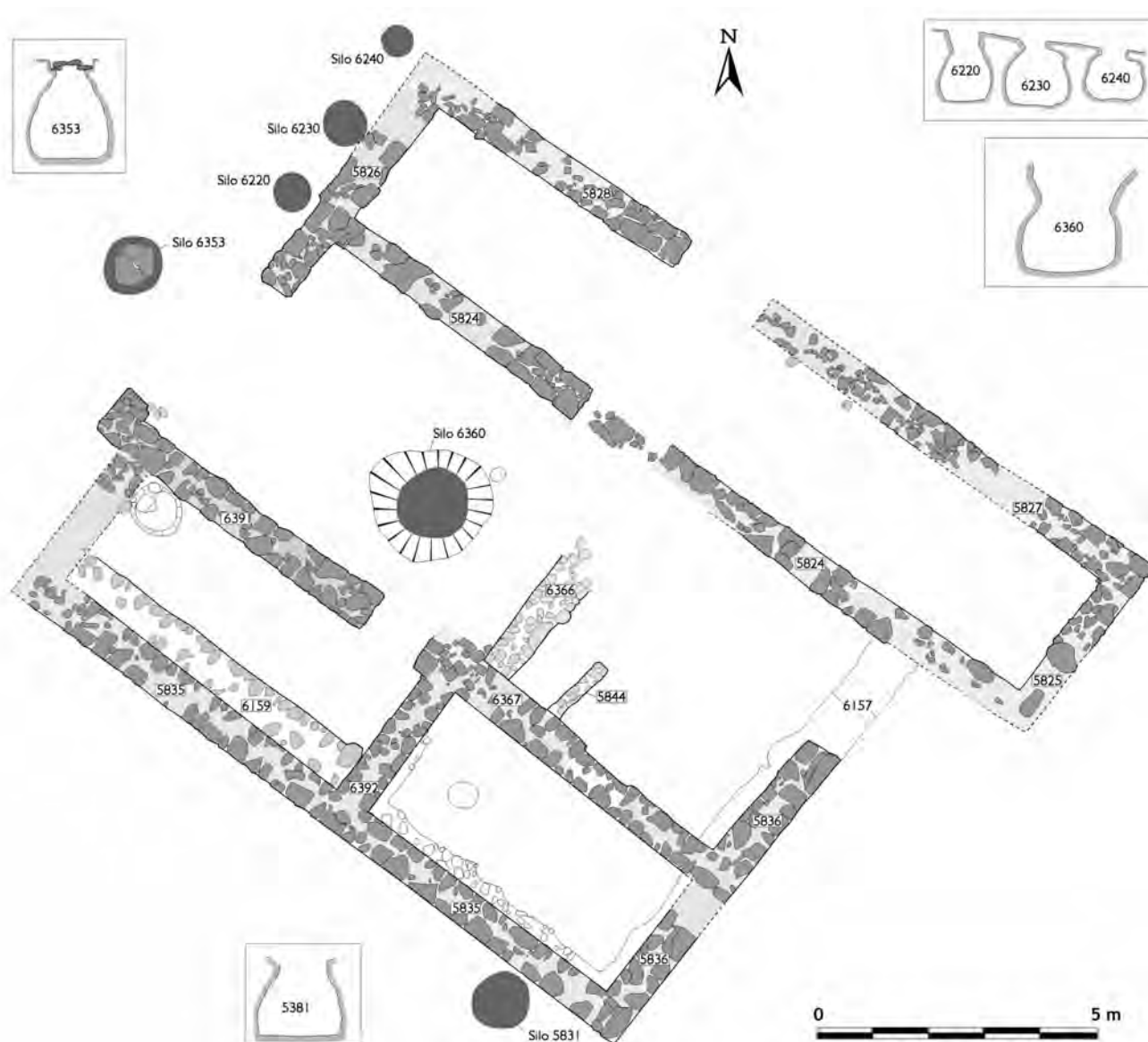


Figure 17.3 Storage pits (silos) distributed around a house in the village of Gózneq (Madrid), datable to the seventh century AD (image: author)

inland territories in the transition period under review. The regional fine ware *par excellence*, namely Terra Sigillata Hispanica Tardía (TSHT), continues to be produced, widely distributed and regularly consumed until the mid-fifth century or perhaps even beyond. However, available data on the active pottery workshops at this time are maddeningly scarce (cf Juan 2016). Relief-decoration generated from a mould is the most typical feature of this class of pottery. From a non-specialist perspective, a perceptible evolution between late imperial wares and post-imperial ones is barely recognisable; rather, close examination is needed to identify slight changes in the processes involved in production (types of shapes, more roughly decorated moulds, less accurate firing at low temperatures, flaws in the glazing application)

and also in the somewhat irregular distribution of products throughout the territory (Vigil-Escalera 2013a). It is difficult to argue about significant evolutions in the meaning of these products over time, but two possible clues can be advanced in this regard: on the one hand, we can observe an increased use of symbolic decoration, such as distinctive seals or motifs, emblems, texts, signs with religious connotations or even complex hunting scenes (Juan *et al.* 2012; Baquedano 2015; Juan and Rodríguez 2015) (Figs 17.4 and 17.5); and on the other hand, there is a growing differentiation between products from specific zones (Fig. 17.6). A few large workshops seem to have been replaced over time by an increasing number of smaller production centres, and this led to a progressive regionalisation of types.



Figure 17.4 Epigraphic decoration with Christian motif in a Terra Sigillata Hispanica Tardía bowl, dating to the first half of the fifth century AD (image adapted from: Juan et al. 2012, Figs 1a and 1b)

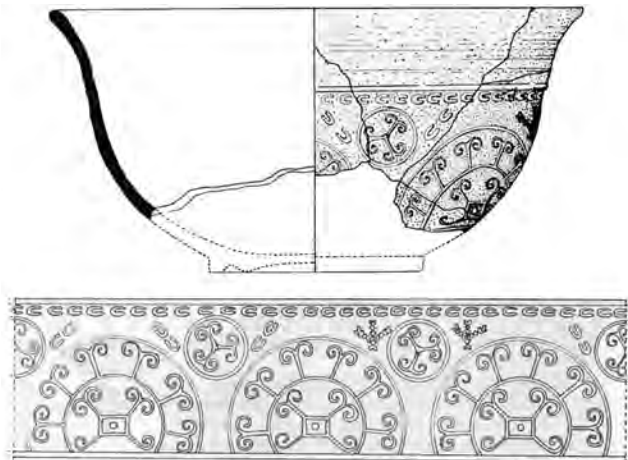


Figure 17.5 Emblems in a Terra Sigillata Hispanica Tardía bowl from Valdearados, Burgos (adapted from: Argente 1979, 169, fig. 42)

Shortly before the mid-fifth century, workshops in Galicia, northern Portugal and the north-west of the Duero basin were coming to replace traditional orange-red wares with grey ones (Fernández 2014; Fernández and Bartolomé 2016). This phenomenon possibly was focussed on the territories under the control of the Suevic Kingdom in



Figure 17.6 Geographical distribution of the main regional pottery wares in Hispania during the fifth century AD

north-west Hispania. At the same time, the last generation of potters producing TSHT gave up the technologically complex system of moulded decoration, and the typical reddish coating became faded or barely perceptible. The 'dying spark of a long tradition' (Hayes 1986, 502) was extinguished and its place was for some time (roughly half a century) taken by South-Gaulish (DSP) and South-Iberian products (TSHTM) as well as a myriad of local imitations of prestigious tableware. The forms remained the same as in the past, with a tendency to simplify them and to reduce their range: thus dishes became increasingly scarce by the late fifth century, while jugs and bowls were eventually the most common forms.

In a sense, such changes in the fine pottery wares (and possible changes in usage and roles) are not sudden ones, but instead seem to be delayed almost half a century before adapting or adjusting to the new political, economic and social realities.

Other signs of continuity, perhaps the most important ones in terms of power display and new modes of control, will likely be best sought in cities, since the urban centres, despite the changes wrought to their own forms (Diarle-Blasco 2014), remained the true axes of political articulation throughout this late antique/Visigothic period and beyond, and the most powerful elites continued to fix their residence there. We are faced with a serious problem of visibility and of archaeological recognition at this point, although the identification of some notable buildings with episcopal complexes in certain sites makes it possible to partially alleviate the shortage of data (Gutiérrez Lloret and Sarabia 2013; Chavarría Arnau 2010).

In addition to the above, the main trends of economic production remained quite stable or met with only minor changes in the aftermath of the imperial demise. These territories had never developed a strong productive specialisation for the international markets under the

Empire. It is possible that wine and oil production at a small scale revived in certain areas to satisfy local demand if foreign imports reached high prices. The operation of oil presses in sites such as Góñez (Madrid) or El Cuquero (Salamanca) (Ariño 2006; Vigil-Escalera and Quirós 2013; Peña 2017) adds to the palynological and palaeobotanical evidence (Blanco *et al.* 2014).

Academic Inertia

Many debated, disputed and contradictory issues in current narratives about this transition period stem not only from insufficient data, but also from difficulties in removing the background noise from the research bibliography and the historiographic baggage. It mainly manifests as the difficulty of critically reviewing suspicious, sweeping or overtly misleading claims from previous work, with new scholars scared or over-cautious in challenging senior, established academics or archaeologists and their views. Hence, for example, we might still be told that the funerary customs and practices of the rural population would have stayed unchanged from the third century AD (in a later Roman context dominated by extensive landownership) until well into the fifth century and into the post-imperial aftermath of a severe structural crisis; from this we would see that people in the countryside behaved and were buried in the same way whether living in the workers' barracks of a palace-like *villa* or residing at a farm surrounded only by fellow, neighbouring peasants. The same style of problem hinders the proper interpretation of occupational sequences of hilltop fortified sites or of the use of radically opposing types of storage systems in late and post-Roman periods. Unsurprisingly, therefore, study of the main regional and local pottery wares (especially home- or coarse wares) from these centuries can sometimes remain badly neglected in some zones, yet others are the focus of much debate, while others are seen as only yielding uncertain dates, or else have time ranges too broad to be useful.

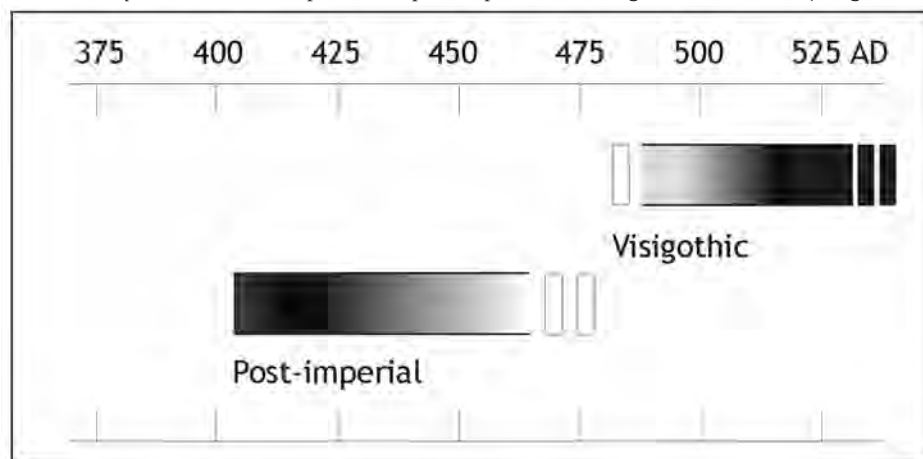
Inaccurate dating of single burials or cemeteries is often due to a misreading of coin finds; these problems have long been noticed (e.g. Christie 2004, 7–8). Sometimes, the date of the coinage rules, even when other elements in the context offer valuable, but alternative chronological significance. Several graves from Lunel-Viel, for example, show the difficulty of accurately dating a context even when it includes an array of objects (Raynaud 2010, 42). One astonishing example comes from a burial in Toledo (Palol 1972): the renowned horse-trapping found inside this grave is typical of the late fourth or fifth century as are other items present there, and yet the burial is still considered to belong to the late second century AD, simply because of the recovery from this of a coin of the reign of Marcus Aurelius.² Amazingly, the chronological attribution made by Palol has remained unquestioned for 50 years in all kind

of research papers and syntheses (e.g. Ripoll 1986; Fuentes 1990, 120; Ripoll and Darder 1994; Aurrecoechea and Ager 2003, 283–285; Aurrecoechea 2009; Arezes 2015, 64–65). In this way, the real chronology of such objects has been artificially delayed almost two centuries, dragging behind it the date of the whole cemetery too. More recently, the dating of another post-Roman cemetery, namely Las Zorreras (Yunquera de Henares, Guadalajara), has been ‘backdated’ in the same way by the presence of coins, leading to the extreme of defining two different phases of use over 200 years for a cemetery with 70 graves (Morín *et al.* 2013). Unfortunately, the examples of misleading and erroneous attribution cited above are not isolated nor exceptional ones.

A case has been recently made with the chronology of rural cemeteries (the noted, previously-labelled ‘Necropoleis del Duero’) from inner Iberia (Vigil-Escalera 2015a). Whether they can represent previously unknown forms of peasant societal behaviour or not mostly depends on their precise date. Suffice to say, for now it would appear that their appearance may well relate to the decay of *villae*, as in northern Gaul.³ We might observe that Palol initially considered these cemeteries as a characteristic feature of the fifth century (1954, 17), but he later retracted this and ended up assigning them a broader chronological range, from the fourth to fifth century (Palol 1966 and 1969). Prevailing narratives (e.g. Fuentes 1989; Abásolo *et al.* 1997; Pérez and Barril 2010) have long supported this view. Much of the historiographic debate since Palol has become trapped in discussing the dualist military–civilian features of some outstanding burials. Many archaeologists and historians have tried to link these burials with an alleged line of late imperial defence in the northern fringes (Palol 1977; Barbero and Vigil 1978) as might be read or inferred from the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Neira 2005). Some have undermined or denied the real implementation of such a system (Arce 1980 and 1982), arguing that there is little or no evidence for such an inner frontier.

The archaeological reality is that these cemeteries have now been discovered all along the inner regions of Iberia, from the Cantabrian coast to the south of the Tajo River, making it difficult to prove any direct link between people buried there and any presumed military garrisons. As seen above, a problem arises if we accept that ordinary people in the countryside continued to use the same burial practices both in the late imperial *villa* landscapes and in post-imperial times. In-depth analyses of these cemeteries suggest that, generally, they match the activity of small-scale residential groups during time ranges, usually not exceeding two or three generations (i.e. 40–75 years). The cemeteries with post-imperial features predate what we can call the typical early Visigothic-type ones, and it is clear that only in exceptional cases do they reveal some degree of continuity. The displacement of a burial ground to a new location is usually only attested when the archaeological conditions

Table 17.1 Sequential relationship between post-imperial and Visigothic cemeteries (image: author)



make its identification possible – namely where excavation of extensive areas occurs (Table 17.1).

A Steady Late Roman Decline?

Although it has not been formulated in a whole or finished form, many scholars concur on the view of a steady Late Roman decline that commences from at least the third century (e.g. Palol 1977; Escalona 2002, 2006). Yet increasing archaeological evidence points instead to a quite different picture, at least in considerations of the second half of the fourth century. Two scenarios of late Roman building works are relevant in this regard: in the first case, at sites like the remarkable octagonal building at Valdetorres del Jarama, Madrid (Arce *et al.* 1997), the construction and internal ornamentation could have been left unfinished because of sudden changed circumstances (socio-political shifts, patronage, etc.); in a second case, certain signs of late or post-imperial decline or of ‘barbarian style’ formally assigned to the fifth or sixth century may actually derive from a demand that was clearly outstripping supply, some ‘real estate bubble’ of the late fourth century. Possible examples in this regard could be the crude patching of some mosaic floors (these worn or damaged by repeated use) identified at a number of sites, including Almenara de Adaja (García Merino and Sánchez Simón 2012); and the surprisingly ‘rustic’ style of the mosaic pavement from Estada (Huesca), whose dating varies from the late fourth to sixth century depending on which author is followed (e.g. Balil 1965, 284; Gómez Pallarès 2002, 41–56, 2015, 62). In the absence of conclusive stratigraphic evidence on post-Roman dates and levels we could rather interpret the perceived ‘poor quality’ of such works as the product of unskilled local artisans trying to replicate (at a cheaper cost) the virtuosity of some reputable, but over-busy workshops otherwise engaged elsewhere (see the important case of Noheda: Valero 2015).

Concluding Remarks

In discussing the sack of Rome by the Goths in AD 410, it has been recently claimed that ‘critical scholarship seeks to undermine traditional historical narrative, while at the same time failing to escape entirely the story it rejects’ (Van Nuffelen 2015, 323). Sometimes, and especially nowadays, we seem to be more concerned about the echo of the news about an event than the event itself. Seven years after the sack of Rome, Orosius wrote: ‘Although the memory of the event is still fresh, anyone ... would think that nothing had happened, as they themselves admit, unless perhaps he were to notice some charred ruins still remaining’ (*Hist.* 7, 40, 2; cited in Mathisen 2013, 100).

It is safe to claim that we lack any direct archaeological evidence confirming the entry into Hispania of Suevi, Vandals and Alans a year or so before the sack of Rome. We can continue to mock the exaggerations that a prudish bishop named Hydatius from a remote Galician see poured into his Chronicle. And we can also remain camped upon the smoky mountain of ruins and look at the horizon, pretending that nothing much happened. However, the effects ‘are to be felt through their impact on perception and cultural habits, rather than in terms of material destruction’ (Van Nuffelen 2015, 328). That is roughly the idea that comes to my own mind when examining the evidential burden arising from the archaeological data from fifth-century inner Hispania.

It has been argued that the archaeology of the first half of that century in most of these regions reveals a sharp break with the previous Late Roman past, and that this entire body of evidence must be understood as a consequence of meaningful historical events that occurred in-between. Available archaeological evidence suggests that the collapse of the Late Roman way-of-life in this territory happened from the highest point of an economic growth cycle (that of the second half of the fourth century). Traditional historiography supports instead a steady decline since the

late third century. Is it possible to reconcile both proposals or are they mutually incompatible? Does it simply depend on the glasses we put on to inspect and interpret the same scene? Are the resulting images really different if we look at the whole from the perspectives of both cities and countryside? Apart from rhetoric, I do not see the possibility of finding a middle ground.

In conclusion, two opposite readings of this period are at stake. The first one presents a late imperial context of urban crisis that sees many aristocrats abandoning the cities to focus the bulk of their investments in palace-like rural estate complexes. According to this version, town and countryside play in antithetical fields, while major changes occur as a result of gradual transformations. Nothing really important happens in the fifth century, because the Visigothic Kingdom is a successor State; invasions ‘and all that’ are a temporary annoyance (Arce 2015); and cities continue to function (and decline) and the law and part of the taxes (although minimal) are maintained.

The second reading considers the fourth century as ‘a late burst of economic prosperity’ (Halsall 2007, 343) that came to an abrupt end in the early fifth century. Three shocking events followed each other in a small handful of years (c. AD 407–409): the unequal war between the army of ‘rustics’ raised by the Spanish relatives of the Emperor Honorius and the legions of the usurper Constantine which ended in Spanish defeat; then came looting of the district of *Pallantia* by the victorious troops; and, finally, the invasion of barbarians (Suevi, Vandals and Alans). Henceforth, only part of the province *Tarraconensis* remained under the authority of Rome. Wherever possible, local powers kept pieces of the system together. Elsewhere, it is possible that all sorts of warlords carved out short-lived territories or challenged old authorities and leaders in the context of a collapsed Roman State (Esmonde Cleary 2013). From this perspective the change is sudden and all-encompassing, and affected the lives of a majority of the population, especially those in the countryside. This mutation fits with Sewell’s definition of the ‘event’ as a ‘brief and intense sequence of social interactions that have long-lasting effects on the subsequent history of social relations’ (2005, 271; cf Beck 2007; Bintliff 2010). Peasant settlements established in the countryside from the fifth century onwards formed the basis of the later, medieval rural population, and shared many of its sociological and economic features. It is in this setting that the impact of adopting long or short chronologies for certain processes appears decisive.

The current means for obtaining better chronological resolutions are susceptible to substantial improvement, and there is little that we can do besides persisting in working through and fine-tuning our analyses as these advances (hopefully) continue. Alongside this we need to embrace theoretical approaches more and to challenge old ideas. At the same time, we cannot afford to fail in simple procedures

and logical reasoning, and this was one of the key aims of this contribution. If progress in research on this period of transformation of the old Roman world really matters, it does not seem advisable to wait and trust that time will do its job with generational scholarly replacement and the exhaustion of clichés. It would be preferable, in my opinion, to move forward and dare to fail. That is what I have tried to do in arguing that the archaeological pieces from this period and this region enjoy a much better fit in the rupturist narrative than they still have in the standard academic position of consensus.

Notes

- 1 This research was supported by the project ‘*Peasant agency and social complexity in north-western Iberia in the medieval period*’ (Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry and Competitiveness HAR2016–76094-C4–2R), the Research Group in Heritage and Cultural Landscapes (Government of the Basque Country, IT931–16), the Group of Rural Studies (Unidad Asociada UPV/EHU-CSIC) and the Research Group ATAEMHIS (University of Salamanca).
- 2 With its lead sarcophagus and an overlying mortar-based structure, it resembles another burial of early fifth-century date from Arroyomolinos, located just 45 km north of Toledo (Vigil-Escalera 2015a, 167–169).
- 3 *Contra* Halsall 2007, 343. However, I agree with his alternative: namely of individual families competing to fill the vacuum left by the aristocrats’ absence/loss or else of proprietors who were compelled to live as part of their communities.

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